SUCCESSION PLANNING FOR THE FIRE SERVICE:
A VISION FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP

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Palm Beach County, Florida

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Appendix Not Included. Please visit the Learning Resource Center on the Web at http://www.lrc.dhs.gov/ to learn how to obtain this report in its entirety through Interlibrary Loan.
ABSTRACT

Many of Palm Beach County Fire-Rescue's (PBCFR) senior fire officers will retire in the next five years. The purpose of this Applied Research Project was to examine how those retirements will affect PBCFR and whether a formal succession plan would be beneficial in coping with the loss of so many senior officers. Evaluative research was conducted to answer the following questions:

1. How do fire departments plan for the professional development of fire officers?
2. Does a lack of succession planning affect organizations?
3. What constitutes successful succession planning?

The procedure employed was a literature review of journal articles that examined professional development training for senior managers and succession planning in the fire service and the public sector. An analysis of employment records from PBCFR was conducted to determine how many personnel will retire and project when those retirements will occur.

The results of the research suggested that succession planning and ongoing professional development of personnel would benefit PBCFR. Research showed that there is a correlation between success and failure within an organization that can be directly attributed to the amount of emphasis placed on professional development of personnel and formal succession planning.

The recommendations from the research included instituting a formal succession planning process to include mentoring and stretch work assignments for personnel. A further recommendation included enhancement of the existing Officer Candidate School.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROCEDURES</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESULTS</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DISCUSSION</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RECOMMENDATIONS</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX (Officer's Eligible for Retirement)</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Palm Beach County Fire-Rescue (PBCFR) is a full service department located on the southeast coast of Florida. PBCFR employs over 1000 men and women and provides advanced life support rescue, fire suppression, hazardous materials mitigation, and public education to a population of approximately 500,000 people spread over a service area of 538 square miles. In 1999 the department responded to over 80,000 alarms (Annual Report, 1999).

PBCFR was formed in October of 1984 after the Florida State Legislature mandated the consolidation of the 12 tax-district departments that provided fire protection for the unincorporated areas within Palm Beach County, Florida. Just prior to consolidation, officers from each district were appointed as district chiefs, battalion chiefs, and deputy chiefs to form a senior level of management for the new department. Now, a majority of those appointed to senior management, as well as many lieutenants and captains, are nearing retirement (Appendix).

Most of PBCFR’s fire officers are members of the baby boomer generation. They came into the fire service at about the same time and will leave at about the same time, a phenomenon that is affecting organizations throughout the country (Byham, 1999; Caudron, 1999). In fact, both Byham and Caudron found that companies across America will lose 40 percent of their senior managers in the next five years. PBCFR employees receive pension benefits through the Florida State Retirement System. This system allows retirement with full benefits after 25 years of continuous service (Florida State

Those fire officers who will soon retire are the gatekeepers for our department and the leaders at every level throughout the organization. They have the institutional knowledge, the commitment, and the passion to maintain the high standards this department has enjoyed for so many years. Who will take their place when they retire?

**Problem Statement**

Palm Beach County Fire-Rescue will lose a majority of their senior fire officers to retirement within the next 5 years. Palm Beach County Fire-Rescue does not have a formal succession plan to insure leadership continuity as those officers retire.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this Applied Research Project was to examine succession planning to determine whether Palm Beach County Fire-Rescue would benefit from a formalized succession plan. Evaluative research was conducted to answer the following questions:

1. How do fire departments plan for the professional development of fire officers?
2. Does a lack of succession planning affect organizations?
3. What constitutes successful succession planning?

**BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE**

Palm Beach County Fire-Rescue (PBCFR) has grown from a 485-person department with a 45 million-dollar budget in 1984 to a full service, metro-size organization with a 98 million dollar budget for fiscal year 1999-2000 (Annual Report,
1985; Annual Report, 1999). The Florida State Legislature hoped that through consolidation a more equitable level of service could be provided to the citizens of Palm Beach County. Sixteen years later, that hope has been realized.

In discussions with other fire officers during classes at the National Fire Academy and at various conferences, this researcher has learned that PBCFR is well respected and even considered one of the leaders in the fire service. PBCFR’s officers have taken a leadership role in local, state, and national initiatives. For instance, at the local level PBCFR took the lead role in developing, implementing, and training over 1200 firefighters, including firefighters from all 21 municipal fire departments, in a personnel accountability system. Ten years prior to that initiative, PBCFR took the lead in developing, implementing, and training all firefighters in the county in the National Incident Management System (Howes, 1997).

At the regional level, PBCFR is the region nine coordinator for natural disasters. It is our responsibility, in conjunction with Palm Beach County’s Emergency Operations Center, to insure that local emergency response agencies have the resources they need when their capabilities are overwhelmed and they need assistance at the regional, state, or federal level (Comprehensive Emergency Management Response Plan, 2000).

Also on a regional level, PBCFR personnel have taken a lead role in developing and coordinating an interdisciplinary Critical Incident Stress Management Team (CISM). The team is modeled after the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation and responds to the needs of firefighters, paramedics, police officers, nurses, and dispatchers. The team provides leadership at the state level for CISM.
Many training initiatives have been developed by senior fire officers to meet the needs of our personnel. Since the beginning of this year, classes in wildland/urban interface, hazardous materials operations, vertical roof ventilation, vehicle extrication, and emergency vehicle operation have been developed and delivered to firefighters throughout Palm Beach County. PBCFR also has instructors that teach at the national level through the National Fire Academy and for the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Another initiative that has set PBCFR apart from most organizations is the commitment to officer development. Just this past June, 24 candidates for lieutenant went through a two-week Officer Candidate School (OCS) that will help prepare them for their future role as a first line supervisor. This marked the third OCS class in as many years, and it is a commitment that both labor and management felt strongly enough about to incorporate into the Collective Bargaining Agreement between PBCFR and Local 2928 (Collective Bargaining Agreement, 1999-2002).

Additionally, many senior fire officers are involved with recruit training. PBCFR hires only certified firefighter/paramedics, who are, however, required to complete an eight-week orientation program that familiarizes them with our system. One of the keys to our success in this area is the fact that the same senior fire officers have been involved in this process for a number of years. Not only do they impart knowledge to others, they also inculcate the recruits in our organizational culture. The result is a core of young firefighters who are motivated and competent and serve as role models for others as they come on the job. Losing this training cadre to retirement will mean a tremendous loss of institutional knowledge that has been passed on to others during this training process.
Other examples of leadership within the department are the people involved in various committees. The vehicle specification committee is an example of specialized knowledge that has been gained over the years. Developing specifications for apparatus is a highly technical job that is continuously evolving as technology and regulations change. Developing Standard Operating Guidelines and working on fire department policy are also examples of people giving their time in a leadership capacity. It will be difficult to replace this expertise as people on these committees retire.

All of these initiatives are possible because of individual commitment and a passion for excellence. These initiatives would not have occurred if it were not for the efforts and leadership capabilities of senior fire officers within PBCFR. Individuals who have taken a leadership role in these initiatives have gained a great deal of institutional knowledge about how to get things done in an ever-changing environment. This knowledge is not something that can be easily transferred when the leadership role is passed to someone else.

Present Impact

The nature of this problem speaks more to the present and the future than it does to the past. Over the past 16 years, PBCFR has developed many senior managers within the organization into fire service leaders. These men and women have had a direct bearing on the success of PBCFR as an organization and on the success of the fire service at a local, regional, state, and national level.

In the early years, PBCFR experienced growing pains associated with the normal evolutionary process that comes with an expanding organization. Senior fire officers helped guide this process, developing policy and procedure and mentoring individuals
that were advancing through the ranks. Now, as an organization that has matured and is in a transition process, the leaders that we have relied on to guide the organization are planning for retirement.

**Future Impact**

Unlike a line officer’s position that is guided by tactical considerations, a senior fire officer's work environment is driven more by strategic goals. Working in this type of environment requires independent thinking and a broad understanding of how the department operates as a whole. Learning the ropes at this level takes time. Most of the senior fire officers within PBCFR have been in their positions for a number of years and are very good at what they do. Again, the people working in these positions have developed a great deal of institutional knowledge about the positions they hold. This knowledge will not be easily transferred to others.

Organizations go through cycles of growth and recession similar to a business cycle. PBCFR has grown over the past 16 years from an upstart organization into a mature organization that is considered a leader in the fire service. With so many senior fire officers approaching retirement, is this organization approaching a recessionary period?

**Relevancy to the Executive Leadership Class**

Succession planning was discussed during the Executive Leadership class. It was clear from the readings, class discussion, and lecture, that succession planning is important for the long-term success of an organization. A private sector case study was used to emphasize this teaching point. It was clear from the readings and from class discussion that succession planning could be useful within the fire service.
The entire emphasis of the Executive Leadership class focused on moving beyond transactional leadership to transformational leadership. Dealing with problems created by retirement of senior fire officers begs for transformational leadership.

The whole focus of the Executive Fire Officer Program is to develop the leadership skills and the visionary thinking of senior fire officers to effectively manage change within the fire service. Managing the change brought about by retirement of senior fire officers may be one of the biggest leadership challenges facing the fire service in the coming years.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

**How do fire departments plan for the professional development of fire officers?**

In 1993, five different fire departments in Oregon formed a coalition to address the need for a formal company officer development program, prior to promotion. They developed curriculum that focused on emergency response, professional development, personnel management, and administrative management. The program is designed to enhance problem solving skills and inter-personal skills. It utilizes a teaching approach that relies heavily on conceptual skills. The program is now in its third year, and feedback from students and fire department management is positive (Kefalas, 1997).

Hensler (1997) found that preparing company officers for promotion to chief officer is a fundamental responsibility of every fire department. Without the opportunity for professional development, fire service leaders of the future will not be adequately prepared for the changing demands of the profession. However, Hensler makes a
distinction between training and professional development education. He feels that training develops skills and techniques in order to prepare people for similar tasks needed on the fire ground. Education leads to information and knowledge that develops leadership potential. He is a proponent of formal education and urges current and future fire officers to seek college level education.

Hawkins Jr. (2000) found that many departments are disappointed with officers, who, although having done well in a promotional process, perform poorly once they are promoted. He blames departments for not mandating professional development training, either before promotion or shortly afterward. Chief Hawkins' department in Alexandria, Virginia, created the Leadership, Education and Development Institute to make sure that all fire department managers are afforded the same level of training. The curriculum is broad based, addressing professional growth, communication, time management, team building, leadership, conflict management, emergency response, and customer service. Although it costs the department 24,000 dollars each time the program is run, Hawkins feels it is a worthwhile expenditure. He has noted a marked decrease in overall personnel related problems, leading to a more positive work environment.

Smoke (1997), a professor in the Fire Science Program at Northern Virginia Community College, feels that people who seek advancement in the fire service should work on their own time to earn that right. He notes that if firefighters want to be considered professionals, they should earn that professional status through education. One place to start is by meeting the competencies for fire officers established by the National Professional Qualifications System. Further education should be sought at the
college level. Smoke feels that all of this training should occur before promotion to the officer level.

Brame & McIntosh (2000) found that the Orange County Fire Authority of California (OCFA), established in 1995, had inherited a large core of senior fire officers who were in the process of retiring or would be retiring in the near future. They soon recognized the need for a formal professional development program for present and future fire managers. OCFA started by developing a vision statement that expressed the direction of the newly created Orange County Fire Authority Leadership Institute. The vision statement says that the Leadership Institute will: "Provide participants with the opportunity to develop and enhance a personal philosophy of leadership that focuses on self, others, the organization and a larger community" (p. 57). The curriculum addresses conflict resolution, leading through vision, inspiring others, team building, and coaching. OCFA recognized that the long-term health of the organization depended on good leadership at all levels of the organization. To emphasize this philosophy, the Leadership Institute is open to anyone who has been employed for five years, regardless of job assignment or rank. The rigorous selection process is modeled after the National Fire Academy's Harvard Fellowship Program. Candidates who are selected must get coverage for their work assignment during class sessions. Candidates understand that OCFA is committed to developing leadership potential of people, regardless of rank. In turn, the participants must recognize that professional development is a personal journey that requires active participation and personal commitment.
Does a lack of succession planning affect an organization?

Caudron (1999) studied the effects of poor succession planning on organizations. One corporation, Motorola, recognized that the retirement of most of their senior management in the next five years was a looming crisis. Although senior managers are the visionaries for their company, no one was ready to move into the senior leadership positions that would soon be vacant. Motorola, recognizing this as a huge problem, instituted a leadership and development program that grooms people to take over key positions as people retire.

Caudron also found that other companies might not be as fortunate as Motorola. Studies revealed that one-fifth of America's large corporations will lose 40 percent of their senior management in the next five years. Most have not done any succession planning. Even those companies that have done succession planning were dismayed to find that there are not enough qualified people to assume senior management roles. In the past, companies simply recruited talent away from other companies, a talent pool that is no longer there.

Byham (1999) found that due to early retirement, a critical shortage, 40-50 percent, of middle and senior managers will occur within the next five years and there will not be enough qualified people to assume these leadership roles. The result will be a typical supply and demand problem and a headhunter's delight, as companies vie for top talent. However, Caudron (1999) found that "66 percent of senior managers hired from the outside fail within the first 18 months" (p.72).

Vouglas (1998), studying how a lack of succession planning adversely affects planning projects, found that a lack of leadership continuity plays a big part in the success
or failure of a project. He cites executive buy-in as a primary reason for the success or failure of a project and notes that if an executive who has championed a project retires before the project has been completed the chance for project failure greatly increases.

Vouglas (1998) also examined AT&T, Coca-Cola and Disney and the difference that succession planning made for each company. AT&T, which did not plan for the succession of their CEO, lost a large part of their market share in the telecommunications industry, severely eroding their stock price as a result. In contrast, Coca-Cola did plan for succession. When their CEO, Roberto Goizueta, died in 1998, Coca-Cola's stock price was not affected. When Disney's president, Michael Ovitz, left the company, a lack of succession planning created a public relations problem and expenses that led to law suits by stock holders who lost money because of the 93 million in cash and stock that Ovitz received when he left the company.

Dutton (1996) studied succession planning and found that even when companies plan for succession, it may not be enough. David Glass was Sam Walton's hand picked successor. Even so, Wal-Mart went through a four year down turn after Walton's death. Long term debt rose from 1.7 billion to 8.5 billion and profit margins fell for the first time since the company went public. Dutton thinks the failure of a smooth transition may be attributed to the way Wal-Mart practices succession planning. A person being groomed for store manager is assigned to work with a manager for a year. Once the training is completed the trainee is assigned to a store as manager. If that person fails, the store manager who acted as trainer is blamed for the failure. Such an approach to succession planning is stressful on both parties and only works well if the trainer has good mentoring and training skills.
Grossman (1999), studying the health care industry, found that even the best hospitals and managed care organizations have not done any succession planning. He predicts a leadership crisis that is about five years away, which will have a significant affect on the efficacy and cost of health care in the United States. He notes that there are corporate role models like General Electric, IBM, and Sears who are taking the lead in succession planning, but likens the health care industry to "a patient with high blood pressure who avoids treatment" (p.18).

**What constitutes successful succession planning?**

Dutton (1996) casts succession planning into four basic categories: simple replacement, full replacement, talent pool, and extended talent pool. Simple replacement identifies two or three people who could step into the next higher slot on an organizational chart. Full replacement takes simple replacement several steps lower on the organizational chart. A talent pool simply identifies internal and external candidates who are farthest along in career development. An extended talent pool includes internal and external candidates, defines what is expected of them, and identifies a structured path they will be required to follow as part of an extended talent pool.

Crockett (1999) found diversity a vital aspect of succession planning. In examining the succession planning that Allstate Corporation practices, she found that it not only insures diversity at all levels in the company, it has also helped profits. Allstate contends that diversity in the workplace has nothing to with political mandates and everything to do with unlocking the potential of everyone in the organization. They also feel that an organization's people should mirror the market that they serve. Because all employees receive career counseling in development opportunities, Allstate's employees
spend in excess of 540,000 hours annually in a classroom setting. Allstate has been ranked by Fortune Magazine as one of the best 50 companies for Asians, Blacks, and Hispanics. 40 percent of the executives at Allstate are women and 21 percent are minorities, due in large part to an ongoing commitment of leadership development that starts upon employment.

Beeson (2000) studied the results of seminars on succession planning strategies that were held by companies like General Electric, Dell Computer, Colgate-Palmolive, and Eli Lilly. He found a common theme identifying a clear link between succession planning and retention of top talent in the senior management ranks. All the companies placed a high priority on retaining top talent, and to do so, they have made succession planning flexible and action oriented. They identify people for future advancement and place them in assignments that force them outside their comfort zones. Doing so builds skills and abilities that prepare them for more responsibility. Open communication about career development and executive involvement in the process is also cited as critical components to successful succession planning. A list of competencies were identified that included priority setting, customer focus, problem solving, drive for results, and team building. Also identified were characteristics that prevented people from being successful. These included an inability to juggle multiple assignments and an inability to deal with ambiguity.

Byham (2000) found that traditional succession planning has failed because it focuses on simply identifying future leaders, rather than developing them. It takes money and energy to develop future leaders. He recommends taking those already identified as talented and placing them in an acceleration pool to fulfill future unmet needs. He
encourages companies to give these people stretch assignments where they are forced to
work outside their normal work environment. He recommends a formal mentoring
program and senior management review of a candidate's progress. Key competencies
were identified that included change leadership, strategic direction, entrepreneurial
insight, and the ability to build business partnerships. He also noted that one of the
hardest parts of program implementation was keeping senior managers focused on their
assigned responsibilities of guiding the acceleration pool process.

Caudron (1996), who views succession planning as an ongoing process that
focuses on leadership development, not executive replacement, advocates maintaining a
pool of leaders that can meet an organization's needs, regardless of what that need might
be. Leadership continuity was identified as the most important component of a succession
planning process. Good succession planning involves identifying gaps in current and
future capabilities, analyzing skills that may be needed in the future, and maximizing and
diversifying the pool of executive candidates. Caudron emphasizes that succession
planning is not a one-time event, but an ongoing process that should become part of an
organization's corporate culture.

Coleman (1992) talks specifically about planning for the succession of a fire chief
from within the ranks. He insists that subordinates be challenged, be involved in key
decision making processes, and practice what he calls the one push rule. Challenging
subordinates by forcing them outside their comfort zone and getting them to think outside
the box are ways to develop leadership skills. Involving them in decision-making
processes helps develop upper level management skills and allows them to see first hand
the rationale behind important decisions. This also strengthens their support for that
decision. The one push rule that Coleman ascribes to is the same as helping a child learn to ride a bicycle. At some point they are ready. One push and off they go, ready to succeed, or not. The same holds true for officers with the knowledge, skill, ability, and potential to accept greater responsibility, give them a project and allow them to succeed or fail. Coleman suggests this may happen over and over as people develop the skills needed to become leaders, ultimately accepting greater responsibilities.

Toth (1998) wrote a series of articles that looks at the role of a fire officer as he or she moves through the ranks to a chief officer's position and the affect this has on succession planning. In the first article he focused on the significance of the trumpets that most officers wear on their collars as a symbol of rank. The first trumpet signifies leadership, and is exemplified by those who are willing to take charge and lead from the front. The second trumpet signifies management. He talks about allocating scarce resources and managing personnel effectively to achieve productivity. The third trumpet signifies role modeling, the importance of competency in technical areas, and consistency in interpersonal relations with others. The fourth trumpet signifies mentoring. Guiding others as they come up through the ranks is one of the most important aspects of a chief officer's job. The fifth trumpet signifies an agent of change. Toth feels this is the most challenging because people resist change. Toth reminds us that the trumpet may be an outdated part of fire service history, but what it signifies should never be forgotten.

Toth (1999a) continues his series by discussing the fire officer's role as a manager. He talks specifically about the ability to weigh strategic factors and understand the objectives of the organization in order to make the right decisions. He feels that the
complexity of the modern fire service demands that people move through the ranks in
order to absorb all the skills necessary to be effective in any fire service organization.

Toth (1999b), concluding his series by writing about the importance of mastering
supervisory skills at each level before advancing, feels there are three skills that need to
be mastered: technical, human, and conceptual. Technical skills are learned early in a fire
officer's career. Then, as the person moves up, human and conceptual skills become more
important. Toth's premise throughout the series is that succession planning is an ongoing
process that starts as soon as a person comes into the fire service.

**Literature Review Summary**

The purpose of this Applied Research Project was to evaluate succession planning
to determine whether PBCFR would benefit from a formal succession plan. The literature
review examined professional development of fire officers, results of poor or no
succession planning, and what constituted successful succession planning. Much of the
literature reviewed was beneficial and had a positive influence on this project.

A common theme emphasizing professional development of personnel and
ongoing succession planning as a key component of a healthy organization was found in
the literature. Conversely, a clear correlation was found between poor or no succession
planning and problems within an organization. The findings show that a pro-active
approach to leadership development is an essential aspect of good leadership within an
organization. Succession planning is a critical component of retaining and promoting top
talent as more and more people reach retirement age. It is clear from the findings of
others that PBCFR would benefit from a formal succession plan.
PROCEDURES

The desired outcome of this research was to determine whether PBCFR would benefit from succession planning. Evaluative research was used to identify how fire departments approach the professional development of their fire officers, the consequences of not planning for succession, and what constitutes good succession planning. Final results of this project were reached after reviewing literature from the public and the private sector, as well as documents obtained from PBCFR that showed date of hire and rank (Appendix).

A literature review was conducted at the Learning Resource Center at the National Emergency Training Center in Emmitsburg, Maryland. A further review of the literature was conducted at Palm Beach Atlantic College in West Palm Beach, Florida. Journal articles on professional development and succession planning were obtained through inter-library loan. Documents from PBCFR related to date of hire and current rank were also reviewed.

Although this may not be a limitation on the research, there were no journal articles from the Learning Resource Center that addressed problems associated with senior officers retiring. There were many articles about succession planning for chief of department; however, this researcher found no articles that examined the issue of succession planning for staff or line officers.
RESULTS

Research Question 1: How do fire departments plan for the professional development of fire officers?

Fire departments are utilizing company officer development programs to insure competency as fire officers are promoted through the ranks. Five departments in Oregon formed a coalition and developed a program that focuses on problem solving and interpersonal skills (Kefalas, 1997).

Hensler (1997) argues that there is a distinction between training and professional development education. He feels that training develops skills and techniques to prepare people for fire ground operations, while education leads to information and knowledge that can develop leadership potential.

Hawkins Jr. (2000) found that testing alone is not the best way of insuring competency once a person receives a promotion. The Alexandria Fire Department, Virginia, created the Leadership, Education and Development Institute to make sure that all fire department officers are at the same competency level. The curriculum includes professional growth, communication, time management, team-building, leadership, conflict management, emergency response, and customer service. The department has noted a marked decrease in overall personnel related problems and a more positive work environment since the program was instituted.

Smoke (1997) cites education as a key component for success, and a good starting point is for prospective fire officers to meet the competencies established by the National Professional Qualifications System for professional fire officers. Smoke also suggests
that fire officers continue their education at the college level. He notes that if firefighters want to be considered professionals, they should earn that professional status through education.

Orange County Fire Authority, California (OCFA) had a large number of senior fire officers retiring in the near future. They needed a formal professional development program and formed the Orange County Fire Authority Leadership Institute. The curriculum includes conflict resolution, leading through vision, inspiring others, team building, and coaching. OCFA, recognizing that the long-term health of the organization depended on good leadership at all levels of the organization, allowed anyone employed for five years, regardless of job assignment, to apply for admission (Brame & McIntosh, 2000).

**Research Question 2: Does a lack of succession planning affect organizations?**

One-fifth of America's large corporations will lose 40 percent of their senior management in the next five years. Motorola is one of those corporations, but they recognized this as a crisis and instituted a leadership and development program that grooms people to take over key leadership positions. However, many companies have not done any succession planning. Even those companies that have planned for succession found there are not enough qualified people to assume senior management roles. Companies that historically recruited from the outside are finding that the talent pool is no longer there. Studies have also shown that people hired from the outside do not perform as well as those promoted and trained from within (Byham, 1999; Caudron, 1999).
Vouglass (1998) examined succession planning for the CEOs of AT&T, Coca-Cola and Disney. AT&T and Disney did not plan for succession and lost a large part of their market share and experienced a decrease in stock price. In contrast, Coca-Cola did plan for succession. When their CEO died in 1998, Coca-Cola's stock price and market share were not affected.

Dutton (1996) found that even when companies plan for succession, it might not be enough. When Sam Walton died and his hand picked successor, David Glass, stepped in, Wal-Mart's long term debt rose from 1.7 billion to 8.5 billion and profit margins fell. Dutton attributes this to the way Wal-Mart practices succession planning. They use a one-on-one approach, so the success or failure of a person moving up in management depends on one trainer's skills.

Grossman (1999) studied the health care industry and found they have not done any succession planning. He feels this will have a significant affect on the cost of health care in the United States. He notes that this crisis is about five years away. He likens the health care industry to "a patient with high blood pressure who avoids treatment" (p.18).

**Research Question 3: What constitutes successful succession planning?**

Several successful styles of succession planning were identified. They included simple replacement, full replacement, talent pool, extended talent pool, acceleration pool, and mentoring. Each style can be useful, depending on a company's specific need, but each author noted that traditional succession planning has failed because it focuses on simply identifying future leaders, rather than developing them. Key competencies for successful succession planning were identified as change leadership, understanding
strategic direction, entrepreneurial insight, and the ability to build business partnerships (Byham, 2000; Dutton, 1996).

Caudron (1996) has a different view of successful succession planning. She notes that it should be an ongoing process, not a one-time event. It should focus on leadership development, with an understanding that leadership continuity is the most important component of a succession planning process. Succession planning should also focus on identifying gaps in future capabilities, analyzing skills that may be needed in the future, and maximizing and diversifying the pool of executive candidates. Caudron emphasizes that succession planning is an ongoing process that should become part of an organization's corporate culture.

Crockett (1999) examined succession planning at Allstate Corporation and found diversity was a key issue and actually helped profits. Allstate has been ranked by Fortune Magazine as one of the best 50 companies for Asians, Blacks, and Hispanics.

Beeson (2000) found a clear link between succession planning and retention of top talent. Open communications about career development opportunities and executive involvement in the process were cited as critical components to successful succession planning. People identified for advancement were placed in assignments that forced them outside their comfort zones. They found that doing so built skills that prepared them for more responsibility. Important competencies included priority setting, customer focus, problem solving, drive for results, and team building. Characteristics were also identified that prevented people from being successful. They included an inability to juggle multiple assignments and an inability to deal with ambiguity.
Toth (1999b, 1999a, 1998) wrote a series of articles that examined the role of a fire officer as he or she moves through the ranks to a chief officer's position and the affect this has on succession planning. He wrote about the increasing level of responsibility that comes with each promotion, from technical skills as a line officer to an agent of change as a chief of department. He emphasized the need to understand the objectives of an organization in order to make the right decisions. He also feels that the complexity of the modern fire service demands that people move through the ranks in order to absorb all the skills necessary to be effective in any fire service organization. He noted three skills that need to be mastered: technical, human, and conceptual. Toth's premise throughout the series is that succession planning is an ongoing process that starts as soon as a person comes into the fire service.

Coleman (1992) wrote about planning for the succession of a fire chief. He advocates forcing people outside their comfort zone and involving subordinates in key decision-making processes. This allows them to see first hand the rationale behind important decisions and develops leadership. Coleman ascribes to the one push rule, where you point a person in the right direction and then let them go. They may succeed or fail, but they will never advance if they are not given the opportunity.

**Final Conclusions**

It is clear from the literature reviewed that professional development and succession planning are important for the future success of an organization. A correlation was found between professional development of fire officers and the success of the organization and a correlation was also found between succession planning and the future success of organizations. Byham (1999) and Caudron (1999) both found that within the
next five years 40-60 percent of America's workforce will retire. Additionally, finding qualified people from the outside is not a best practice. This further justifies the need for succession planning.

DISCUSSION

**Relationship between the study and the findings of others**

Documents (Appendix) related to date of hire and rank mirror findings by (Byham, 1999; Caudron, 1999). They cite 40-60 percent of the workforce will retire within the next five years. These findings are consistent with information obtained from PBCFR personnel records.

Brame & McIntosh (2000); Hawkins Jr. (2000); Hensler (1997); and Kefalas (1997) cite professional development training as a key component of teaching leadership skills to fire officers. PBCFR has instituted an Officer Candidate School to address officer development. A total of 75 candidates for lieutenant have now graduated, and informal feedback shows that the training has been successful.

Byham (1999); Caudron (1999); Grossman (1999); and Voglas (1998) all studied the effects poor or no succession planning has on the health of an organization. PBCFR has not done any formal succession planning and it is not possible at this time to draw a correlation between that research and PBCFR's lack of succession planning.

**Interpretation of study results**

Examination of personnel records (Appendix) shows that PBCFR can expect a large percentage of the workforce to retire within the next five years. This percentage will
include a number of senior fire officers. PBCFR is different from most private
corporations examined in the literature review in that we have a promotional process that
is designed to fill vacancies as they occur. The promotional process has kept pace with
vacancies to this point and should continue to keep pace. However, a real concern exists
about replacing so many experienced fire officers with young, inexperienced officers.

PBCFR’s Officer Candidate School will be an increasingly valuable tool for
officer development as more senior officers retire. The majority of our officers have been
in their positions for a number of years and have gained a tremendous amount of
experience over those years. As they retire, and new officers take their places, that level
of experience will no longer be there, further emphasizing the need for professional
development.

**Organizational implications**

The implications associated with the retirement of senior fire officers may have a
far-reaching affect on PBCFR. Although difficult to measure, there will be a loss of
leadership experience on the fire ground that may affect firefighter safety. PBCFR has
never had an on the job fatality and very few serious injuries.

The institutional knowledge of senior fire officers is another area that will be lost,
yet is hard to measure. Many of the programs that allow us to be successful as a
department may be in jeopardy as senior people retire. The Officer Candidate School and
the Recruit Training Academy are two such programs that may not be as effective when
the senior officers who provide leadership for both of those programs retire. The entire
fabric of the organization depends on leadership from individuals. It is difficult to assess
how the loss of senior fire officers will affect PBCFR in the coming years.
RECOMMENDATIONS

PBCFR is a large department that has many of the same problems found in corporations across the country. The problem addressed by this Applied Research Project was PBCFR's lack of a formal succession plan and how that might affect leadership continuity. In the next five years a majority of PBCFR's senior officers will retire. Byham (1999) and Caudron (1999) found that 40-60 percent of the companies studied faced the same attrition rate due to retirement.

The purpose of this Applied Research Project was to evaluate whether PBCFR would benefit from a formal succession plan. Brame & McIntosh (2000); Hawkins Jr. (2000); Hensler (1997); and Kefalas (1997) clearly showed that professional development is a key component to successful leadership in an organization. Beeson (2000); Byham (2000); Caudron (1996); Crockett (1999); Dutton, 1996); and Toth (1998, 1999a, and 1999b) clearly showed that succession planning is a critical component for retaining talented people in an organization.

Recommendations stemming from this Applied Research Project include instituting a formal succession plan, a formal mentoring program, and an annual offering of PBCFR's Officer Candidate School. A formal succession plan should include stretch assignments for people who have demonstrated an interest in assuming responsibilities beyond their normal job assignment (Beeson, 2000; Byham, 2000). This would assist individuals in expanding their capabilities, give them opportunities to work in other areas of the department, and groom them for increased future responsibilities. There are many opportunities available for stretch assignments that have historically been given to district chiefs and above. Offering stretch assignments to captains, lieutenants, and firefighters
would provide a valuable professional development training opportunity to many more people and would give the fire department administration more insight into the capabilities of personnel.

When appropriate, people that might not otherwise be considered should be included in decision-making processes. Allowing people to have a say in areas that affect their work environment would build trust and create more buy-in for decisions that are controversial (Coleman, 1992).

Assigning mentors would provide leadership continuity as people retire (Byham, 2000). Many staff positions would benefit from a formal mentoring process. Personal and political associations, both internally and externally, are very important at the staff level. Knowing the key players, and having a comfortable working relationship with them, would make the transition into a staff position easier.

Providing an annual offering of the Officer Candidate School would enlarge the pool of trained candidates for promotion. Brame & McIntosh (2000); Hawkins Jr. (2000); Hensler (1997); and Kefalas (1997) all suggested that formal professional development programs were beneficial to fire department organizations. Making the school a prerequisite for promotion to lieutenant and asking students to find their own coverage would refine the pool of candidates to those truly interested in self-development and promotion (Smoke, 1997). This would also benefit the department by reducing overtime costs that have exceeded 75,000 dollars for each of the past three sessions.

Future readers who may wish to refine this process would benefit from continuing analysis of fire department employment records and stay abreast of any changes in the Florida State Retirement System. These are two variables that could affect time frames of
when people choose to retire. Finally, it is this researcher's recommendation to strive for open communication throughout the organization. Much of the literature showed open communication as a common thread that made any succession planning initiative more successful. Understanding how each area of the department works, understanding how each area influences other areas, and moving beyond an all too common us against them mentality, is vital to insure succession planning success.

This researcher considers the changes that PBCFR will experience in the next five to ten years from the retirement of so many senior fire officers as an opportunity to continue our leadership role in the fire service. A pro-active approach must be taken to address the challenges that confront this organization. Instituting a formal succession plan, a formal mentoring program, and offering ongoing professional development through the Officer Candidate School would be a firm commitment to the future needs of PBCFR and the larger fire service.
REFERENCES


