

**Measuring and Improving
Organizational Change Readiness
in the Libertyville Fire Department**

Strategic Management of Change

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ABSTRACT

The Libertyville Fire Department was encountering problems of instability and change resistance because a number of changes that occurred within the last three years. Leadership succession coupled with the privatization of a new station threatened organizational paralysis. The purpose of this research project was to measure and improve the change-readiness of the organization. The research used both historic and evaluative methodologies, including survey research. Analysis of the literature concerning organizational change was also undertaken. The following research questions were considered:

1. What information can organizational change literature or research offer regarding the changes occurring within the Libertyville Fire Department?
2. What is the level of change-readiness or change-acceptance of the active members of the Libertyville Fire Department at the onset of this study?
3. What is the level of change-readiness or change-acceptance of these members following an intervention designed to enhance these characteristics?

The procedures included an extensive literature review, initial surveys of the department's members, a SWOT (Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, Threat) analysis of the department, and a final application of the surveys. The results found that the department was already change-ready with the strongest measure of this trait exhibited by the chief officers and the lowest measure by the lieutenants. The intervention of the SWOT analysis did not appear to have any significant impact. The study recommended that organizational change-readiness was preferred to change management; visionary leadership and a strong supportive coalition were critical to success; and succession strategies and lieutenant change-traits needed to be developed.

Table of Contents

	Page
Abstract.....	3
Table of Contents.....	4
Introduction.....	5
Background and Significance.....	6
Literature Review.....	11
Procedures.....	17
Results.....	20
Discussion.....	28
Recommendations.....	31
References.....	34
Appendix A - Survey Instruments.....	37
Appendix B - SWOT Questionnaires.....	41
Appendix C - SWOT Content Analysis.....	45

INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 1995, the man who had been the fire chief of the Libertyville Fire Department for the previous 26 years retired. While a 23-year veteran of the department was promoted to chief from within, by the summer of 1998 all three assistant chiefs had also retired, as well as a senior lieutenant. Additionally, under the direction of a new mayor, a third fire station was opened employing contractual firefighters. The resulting changes have threatened to paralyze the department. The problems facing the Libertyville Fire Department were directly related to these rapid changes. Leadership succession or privatization would have been significant issues alone. Combined, they tore at the very fabric of the organization.

The purpose of this research was to evaluate the ability of the department to deal with these changes, and to ascertain whether a particular intervention could assist in this process. The research employed both historic and evaluative research methodologies. Literature regarding organizational change was examined in order to develop the theoretic and analytic foundations upon which the department would be assessed. Department members were then surveyed regarding their attitudes for change both before and after an attempted intervention. The following research questions were pursued:

1. What information can organizational change literature or research offer regarding the changes occurring within the Libertyville Fire Department?
- 2, What is the level of change-readiness or change-acceptance of the active members of the Libertyville Fire Department at the onset of this study?
- 3 What is the level of change-readiness or change-acceptance of these members following an intervention designed to enhance these characteristics?

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

The Libertyville Fire Department was established in 1895, one year after a conflagration destroyed much of its downtown. From this time until 1969, the department consisted of roughly 20 to 30 volunteer firefighters and operated out of a single fire station located in its downtown area. From 1912 until 1969, only five volunteer fire chiefs led this organization with an average tenure of 11 years.

As the Village of Libertyville began to lose its rural flavor to the suburban nature that it shared with a growing number of communities in the Chicago region, the village hired a full time fire chief. The year was 1969, and within a year, Chief Reitman had convinced the Village to hire four full time firefighters. Hired in 1970, these men performed routine station and equipment maintenance, and conducted fire prevention inspections on a 40-hour per week format. Their daytime availability complimented the availability of the volunteers during the evening and weekend.

In 1971, the chief convinced the village to hire three additional personnel and began three 24/48 hour shifts with two firefighters per shift. Even though all seven of these firefighters were hired from within the volunteer ranks, the change to career personnel as well as some policy changes, for instance, beer was no longer allowed in the fire station, the department had undergone its most significant change in over 70 years.

The next major change occurred within the department in 1976. Hiring five new full time firefighters, some of whom came from outside the volunteer department, the organization ventured into paramedic services. Even though Libertyville was one of the first departments in the region to enter this arena, it had a rather long history in emergency medicine. For decades, members had been trained in first aid. Unlike many fire departments in the county, Libertyville maintained equipment such as a

resuscitator, and as a result was called upon by its neighbors to respond to mutual aid requests. The move to paramedic services was facilitated therefore, by an established commitment to the field of emergency medicine as a function of the fire department. This commitment was augmented by the zealous endorsement of the department's leadership, and by the voluntary participation of a significant number of career and volunteer personnel in the requisite training. Therefore, while the move to paramedic services was a significant change in personnel and mission, it was met with little resistance and it was more of an incremental than large-scale change.

For nearly the next 20 years, the department grew incrementally, expanding personnel and services under a consistent leadership cadre. Even when the department abandoned its downtown headquarters station in favor of a two-station operation in 1991, the move created challenges to the status quo, but generally resulted in minor and palatable adaptations in operations, responses, personnel, and communications. A major shift from this stable environment occurred in 1995 and continues through today.

After 26 years as the department's only full time chief, Chief Reitman announced his retirement. The three assistant chiefs at this time had each served in their positions for the previous 15 years, and two were seeking the chief's position. Because of the department's unwritten policy of maintaining shift stability, and the chief's "hands off" approach to shift management, each shift had developed a distinct nature or culture that reflected (or was reflected by) its assistant chief. Since the shift differences were significant, by hiring from within there was the risk of at least increasing the anxiety of some personnel, if not their alienation. Of course, the same would potentially be true if an outside candidate were hired, however, hiring from within would necessarily bring a change in the balance of power to the

organization.

On June 1, 1995, the village promoted the assistant chief who headed the division of administrative services to the position of chief. Among his initial assignments were, first, to improve the marketing of the department, and second, complete a task force report regarding the development of a third fire station outside the village, but within the bordering fire protection district with whom it supplied services by contract. The day-to-day work of the department continued without significant changes with the shifts and their leaders were left intact during the transition. Coincidentally, but significantly, the individual promoted to fill the new chief's absented assistant chief's position was his closest personal friend. Additionally, in 1995, a lieutenant with 20 years experience retired. The changes in leadership had only just begun!

In 1996, the assistant chief in charge of the support services division left the department with a heart and lung disability after 29 years of service. In the same year, the last one of the group of original seven shift firefighters retired with 28 years of experience. In 1997, the last of the original assistant chiefs, the one who had unsuccessfully competed for the position of chief, retired to assume a chief's position out-of-state. Less than a year later in 1998, the assistant chief who had just been promoted in 1995 retired because of a conviction of vehicular reckless homicide. The same year, a senior lieutenant and staunch supporter of the assistant chief who took the out-of-state chief's position, retired and took a chief's position in a community a couple of hours away. Therefore, in less than three years, the Libertyville Fire Department went from an officer corp with a chief of 26 years, assistant chiefs each with 15 years in position, and three lieutenants with over 20 years of service, to an officer corp with the chief having three years in position, and all the other officers (three assistant chiefs and seven lieutenants)

having less than three years in rank.

While leadership succession was causing unprecedented change, that was not all that was facing the department. To better market the department, the new chief implemented block party and neighborhood picnic participation by station personnel. Cul-de-sac drills were also initiated, and the Friday lunch period was interrupted during the summer months so members could participate in the popular downtown “lunch-in-the-park” program. Simultaneously, annual performance evaluations were adjusted to reflect the changing goals and values of the department and a more uniform, less generous, set of metrics were established. In 1997, the fire chief and police chief successfully argued before the board of fire and police commissioners that the merit and efficiency component of promotional testing ought to be increased from 10 percent to 30 percent. This increase came at the expense (decrease) of the seniority and written components of the process.

While numerous reasons have been offered, it can be assumed these stresses and strains, fears and anxieties, and deviation from the status quo caused at least one-third of the department’s firefighter/paramedics to seek union representation in October 1997. This alone has caused increased divisiveness within the department, as the other two-thirds of the department wrestle with the implications. To add further to the instability, in May 1998, the village opted to staff the newly opened Station #3 with private contractual firefighter/paramedics. This program is arguably the most significant change in the 103 year history of the department.

The decision to privatize Station #3 was unrelated to any of the previous changes, but was the result of a crisis itself. The village and fire protection district had operated under a formula-based contract for over 40 years with little difficulty. However, the fire protection district had autonomously

begun construction of Station #3, and was now pushing to staff it. This caused the village to reopen the contract. Heretofore, costs had been roughly split 65/35 with the village and district paying their respective percent of the total. The village balked at the prospect of hiring at least 12 personnel, none of whom would be actually working inside the village. The village also overestimated the time it would take to build a station. Due to nuances in Illinois law, municipalities were bound to bid competitively for most major expenditures, while fire protection districts were not. Therefore, even though the village had the experience of just building two fire stations only seven years earlier, the district was able to build its station in a much shorter time. This accelerated construction and the reopening of the contract schedule led to a situation where the building was going to be completed, but there would be no one to staff it. As a result of this dilemma, private contractors were employed with a one year contract which will expire in April 1999. While the members of the department have yet to vote on union representation, all members are anxious to see what action the village will take in the new budget, which will take effect in May 1999.

This research project addresses the issue of change within the Libertyville Fire Department, particularly as it relates to the capability of the organization to respond to non-incremental, unforeseen changes. Change and change-resistance are issues analyzed in the Strategic Management of Change course given at the National Fire Academy. This research project will in fact use measurement instruments from that class in order to ascertain the change- readiness of the Libertyville Fire Department. It is hoped that the measures and strategies developed for improving organizational response to change in the Libertyville Fire Department can be of assistance to other communities and their departments.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Niccolo Machiavelli once said, "There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in success than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things." (Stewart, 1994, p.106). Yet we live in a time when it would appear that we have no option other than to deal with this "difficult...perilous...uncertain" venture of change. Indeed, it seems to be the nature of things today. Consider the following, "It is not too much to say that in these respects more has been done, richer and more prolific discoveries have been made, grander achievements have been realized in the course of 50 years of our own lifetime than in the previous lifetime of the race." (Duening, 1997, p.5). Change is inevitable (DiRisio, 1996), yet difficult (Lewis, 1998), and if past trends are any indication, the rate of change will only increase (Pascale, Millemann and Gioja, 1997). In fact, it has been argued that revolutionary changes are both inevitable and natural (Greiner, 1972; DiRisio, 1996; Wagner, 1995; Frost, Gannarelli, Hunt, DeRaad, 1995). Some authors have argued that change has always been with us, and that we are simply overreacting to the claims of the latest business fads (Greiner, 1972), (Pascale, Millemann, Gioja, 1997; Organ, 1997; Duening, 1997). As evidence, they point out that the quote earlier in this section regarding the amount of change in the last 50 years was actually written in 1868 (Duening, 1997). They would have it that today's assertions regarding any uniqueness of the modern situation is simply aggrandizement. Therefore, from this perspective, in order to deal with today's changes, we should not discard old, tried and true methods (Organ, 1997; Clement, 1994). Change should be attempted slowly and moving quickly only invites peril (Duening, 1997). On the other hand, other authors, including Tom Peters, argue that the changes we encounter today occur only once every 200 years (DiRisio, 1996; Bottoms, 1995). From this perspective, radical

new strategies must be employed if we are to meet today's challenges. These certainly cannot be incremental in nature (Pascale, Millemann, and Gioja, 1997).

Whether change is continuous or discontinuous, evolutionary or revolutionary, may not be so much the issue as is modern organizations' failure to deal with it. Despite the current pervasiveness of change, noted author Meg Wheatly surveyed 300 senior executives and found that only 18 percent of organizational change efforts yielded substantial positive results (Brown, 1994). In similar findings, Stewart reported a failure of 2/3 of TQM programs (Stewart, 1994), while Kotter stated that few of the change programs he studied have been very successful, and 50 percent were failures (Kotter, 1995). Modern organizations must deal with change more effectively.

Just as change is inevitable, resistance to change also seems universal. Indeed it is said that the only person who welcomes change is a wet baby, and even those employees who claim to embrace change only do so if the anticipated change does not affect them (Mariotti, 1996).

Because of this recent inability to successfully manage organizational change, the literature has a plethora of strategies designed to improve performance. Paralleling the aforementioned diversity of opinion as to the nature of today's change, authors differ on their opinion vastly on the nature of these strategies. A minority of strategies endorse programs which do not attempt to alter an organization's culture, but rather prefer to work with and through it. Incrementalism, commitment, and follow through are coupled with long time-frames, typically five to ten years (Stewart, 1994). The vast majority of today's organizational change literature calls for the formation of completely new organizational structures that are less command and control in form (Pascale, Millemann and Gioja, 1997), as well as less hierarchical (Lester, 1998). The old Newtonian, mechanical view of organizations which counted on

force or enticements and suggested to be inept in today's environment, and a more organic form favoring more information and responsibilities to lower level employees is evolving. For instance, it is argued that Wheatly's "de-engineering" strategy is descriptive of the Army's NTC model where it is critical that the "big picture" is conveyed to the smallest units where decisions "in the trenches" must be made (Pascale, Millemann and Gioja, 1997; Brown, 1994). In this view, the idea of a change program is an oxymoron (Slater, 1995). Managing change is not enough (Lewis, 1998). The organization must develop a change-ready philosophy that embraces adaptation (Mariotti, 1997). This continual transformation-embracing approach is needed if we are to succeed when employing TQM, re-engineering, and other initiatives (Dreilinger, 1994). Furthermore, it is suggested that this process must be continual. "Painting the bridge" is an expression referring to how large bridges like the Golden Gate are a never ending renewal process, this reflects the nature of what our organization must become (Pascale, Millemann and Gioja, 1997).

To become such an organization, some traits are apparent. The most important of these is a strong leadership and support for change within the management corp. Without adequate leadership or the support of management, change efforts are bound to fail (Kiely, 1995; Sheridan, 1998). Without the commitment from the top of the organization through the line supervisors, credibility with employees will diminish, and the resultant employee resistance and fear will be the nemesis of any change effort (Dreilinger, 1994). While some authors seem confused about the cliché, they agree on the concept that change must come from leaders and managers who "walk-the-walk" (Dougherty, 1997), or "walk-the-talk" (Kotter, 1995). In either case, change is recognized as a top/down phenomena (Lester, Piore and

Malek, 1998; Dreilinger, 1994; Sheridan, 1996; Strebel, 1996). Curiously, it is frequently the senior managers who demonstrate the greatest resistance to change, often because they are promoted or recruited to enhance the status quo. That is why new leaders will often be recruited from outside the organization and many senior managers leave (Greiner, 1972). The change leader must therefore be prepared to begin alone and communicate the need for change. The change leader needs to communicate openly and build a collaborative support for change (Clement, 1994). It is critical that there be trust and a vision upon which a momentum for change can build (Dreilinger, 1994). An inspirational leadership whose roots are found in Plato (Wagner, 1995) must transmit the core values and vision for change if the process is to succeed (Reynierse, 1994; Clement, 1994; Duening, 1997). Additionally, in order to succeed, the change leader must build a supportive coalition with a critical mass which will carry the message through the organization (Kotter, 1995). This coalition typically consists of senior managers, and the change leader must be prepared to answer the “whys” of the needed change (Sheridan, 1996). This coalition must then carry the message of change throughout the organization, eliciting support from at least one in ten employees (Moskal, 1997). Ultimately, much of this communicative effort must be one-to-one (Fisher, 1995), and the importance of line supervisors in the process must not be underestimated (Lakin, 1996). Even when the process is of such a trickle-down nature, the need for the presence and support of the visionary leader is not diminished. The leader and the vision can be transmitted throughout the organization by large scale events such as town meetings (Strebel, 1996; Brigham, 1996). Change requires creativity, and creativity is a social process (Lester, Piore and Malek, 1998). To change the very fabric of an organization, to transform it, requires new compacts with employees (Strebel, 1996). The change leader must be trusted (Dreilinger, 1994), must

stay focused (Fisher, 1995), and must remain visible. This is not a job to relegate to consultants or marketing types (Kiely, 1995).

In addition to spreading the vision and the need for change, the change leader must demonstrate the organizational commitment by providing institutional support (Hairston, 1996). The change leader will know that employee involvement is critical. Founded upon Aristotle's tenets of empowerment (Wagner, 1995), small groups which are ready for change must be given the power to effect it (Smith, 1994). Following the tenet that a "rising tide raises all ships", the change leader must be willing to discuss problems with change-ready employees and let them seek solutions (Reynierse, 1994). Similarly, there should be reinforcement of change initiatives in annual performance reviews. Leadership defines what succeeds and therefore, what is to be measured (Lewis, 1998). It is not unreasonable then that performance evaluations support those behaviors needed for the "new" organization (Kotter, 1995). Similarly, great attention should be paid to who is hired and who is promoted (Lewis, 1998). Attitude and behavior traits that support the new vision must be considered. Finally, change leadership must understand the change resistance of some employees and must be prepared to transfer, "retire", or dismiss those employees who sabotage the program. In some instances, this has accounted for up to one-quarter of the workforce (DiMattia, 1997).

Recognizing the importance of leadership to change programs, it is germane to this research project regarding the Libertyville Fire Department to also describe the impact of a change of leadership as a change agent itself. When a new leader takes over an organization, it is often a time of increased hopes, anxieties, and uncertainties. In fact, it may be one of the most difficult times for an organization. The sense of loss may result in a psychological dislocation and followers may feel a sense of betrayal

and anger, especially if the leader was a corporate hero in their eyes. Factions within an organization may start or grow during this leadership succession. Dependence and affection for the leader who has left and his/her followers will be re-aligned, and not always toward the new leader (Dreilinger, 1994). Leadership succession, therefore, is a considerable change agent in and of itself, and can add significantly to organizational turmoil.

If there is disagreement in the literature regarding strategies for organizational change, it is regarding the importance of turmoil or chaos as a change agent itself. On one hand, we recall the earlier assertion that the only person who looks forward to change is a wet baby (Mariotti, 1996). Along a similar vein, Samuel Johnson once said, "When a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully." (Fisher, 1995). Urgency fosters change (Strebel, 1996; Kotter, 1995). Change doesn't happen without pain (Bottoms, 1995), and generally, the public sector doesn't feel the pain felt in the private sector (Dougherty, 1997). The example of tenure from institutions of higher learning parallel firefighters civil service protection. It is argued that tenure institutionalizes not only job security, but also change resistance (Dougherty, 1997). From this viewpoint, employees with tenure do not have the motivation to change.

There is another way of viewing tenure, however. Because employees have job security, it is argued that they can be more creative and more risk taking than their counterparts without such security (Gilliland, 1997). These are aforementioned attributes of change-ready organizations. It then becomes a question of how best to motivate such employees. If fear or a crisis are not available as motivators, then position-based strategies need to be employed (Frost, Gannarelli, Hunt and DeRaad, 1995).

Returning to the concepts of inspirational leadership, core values, mission and vision, good

communications, and work force involvement, change can be internalized.

The assumption of the need for pain can be minimized (Reynierse, 1994). Optimism not crisis prevails in this scenario (Kiely, 1995), and slow, incremental change is preferred over the peril invited by rapid change (Duening, 1997). While these differing strategies regarding the parameter of urgency offer sound reasoning, it may well be that the choice of strategy may be more determined by circumstance than design.

PROCEDURES

The first stage of the research procedure for this project was a review of the literature on organizational change. The articles for this review were obtained from the Info Trac 2000 Database. This is a computer database of several hundred periodicals, magazines, and newspapers published from 1994 through November 1998. Access to Info Trac was made through the Internet access and subscription of the Cook Memorial Library in Libertyville, Illinois, during the month of November 1998. At the same time, related books were also obtained through this facility and its interlibrary loan provisions. An additional Internet search was performed using the AOL-Net Find search engine of America On-Line. This search was performed on both office and home personal computers. The books and articles identified during these searches were reviewed for their applicability to the literature and results section of this paper.

The second stage of this research procedure for this project was the administration of two surveys to the full-time, uniformed employees of the Libertyville Fire Department during the month of September 1998. This included the private contractual firefighters recently hired to staff Station #3. Therefore, the group to be surveyed included 30 civil service officers and firefighter/paramedics as well

as nine private service contractual firefighter/paramedics. These surveys were obtained from the National Fire Academy's course entitled Strategic Management of Change which was attended by this author in the Spring of 1998. These surveys were chosen to measure the change-readiness of the department's employees. The surveys and a scale interpreting the results are available for review in Appendix A . Since the department was already participating in an internal customer satisfaction program, it was neither unusual for the Chief to be meeting with the employees personally, nor was it unusual for them to be asked to participate in a survey. The format for these meetings was that personnel from all three stations would convene in the headquarters training room during a regularly scheduled training period for that shift. The meetings were held on three consecutive days in order to meet with each 24-hour shift. Members not available on these days did not participate in the survey.

The third stage of the research procedure for this project was a series of questionnaires and meetings designed to elicit the civil service members' assessment regarding the nature of the department's strengths, weaknesses, opportunity, and threats. This process, referred to as SWOT, has been referred to often in various fire training venues, but had not been employed at Libertyville prior to this effort. The members were also polled regarding their opinion of the department's mission and vision. Explicitly, one meeting was held on strengths and mission, followed several weeks later with a meeting on weaknesses and vision, and finally, several weeks later, there was a meeting regarding opportunities and threats. A copy of the questionnaires is found in Appendix B. During each of these meetings, the Chief acted as both leader and facilitator of the discussions. These meetings were attended only by the civil service, full-time employees of the Department; the private contractual employees were excluded. Three reasons are offered for this exclusion. First, it was felt that they were too new to the

organization to have developed an “insider’s” opinion. Second, since it was understood that the contract for private contractual firefighter/paramedics was a major source of the tensions that the Department was experiencing, their presence would have stifled open discussion. And third, by excluding a portion of the workforce from an intervention such as SWOT, this group of employees could be treated as a control group, if that became desirable.

The fourth and final stage of the research procedure for this project was the administration of the original survey instrument a second time to all full-time employees, including the private contractual employees. This occurred near the end of November 1998. The procedures were the same as those described in the second stage of these procedures.

The limitations inherent with these procedures pertain mostly to the sample size. Because there are only 39 possible subjects, loss of subjects on survey dates or during SWOT presentations threatened statistical validity. Sample size also denied any substantive descriptive statistics being employed for subsets of the sample, such as the chief officers.

Another significant limitation is that what we are attempting to measure are attitudes regarding change. Attitudes are not behaviors and evaluating the nature of the attitudes regarding change need not correlate to how members behave when the change affects them directly. Nor can it be assumed that any change in attitudes during the test period can be ascribed only to the designed intervention. Other events occur, including those of a personal nature, that can be significant. During this study a number of members were dealing with the discovery that they were about to become parents while others were involved in divorce proceedings. Such changes in personal affairs could easily overshadow a workplace intervention.

Finally, there is a limitation in assuming that the aggregation of individual attitudes constitutes an organizational trait. Social entities are not the simple sum of their constituent parts. Assertions regarding the change readiness of an organization, albeit important conceptually and practically, cannot be totally accepted on the basis of these surveys alone. Notwithstanding these limitations, this process will be of value as an initial assessment and as a starting point for the sustained efforts required to bring a new culture of organizational readiness.

RESULTS

At the beginning of this research project, three research questions were identified. The results of the research are:

1. What information can organization change literature or research offer regarding the changes occurring within the Libertyville Fire Department?

Overwhelmingly, the literature supports the concept that successful organizational change is more likely if it is a top-down phenomena. Since recent changes have included a succession crisis caused by unexpected retirements, and unplanned privatization efforts, the idea of a leader-led change management program would appear faulty. Rather, the literature which supports the move away from change management toward a transformational organizational philosophy would appear more appropriate for the situation in Libertyville. Crisis did not need to be manufactured to create a sense of urgency, it was thrust upon the organization by unforeseen forces. This, however, does not diminish the need for a top-down effort. Inspirational leadership that can project a positive mission and vision is needed to develop a change-ready organization. The change leader must also be able to build a solid coalition, preferably among senior managers while also maintaining a presence among the rank-and-file

to bring the message of change throughout the organization. Face-to-face communications through large scale events, such as whole organization “town meetings”, need to be employed. The leader must establish trust and demonstrate a willingness to lead by example, to be willing to “walk-the-talk”. This fact must be demonstrated throughout the management corp. Additionally, the leader and guiding coalition must listen to employees concerns, answer their questions honestly, and be prepared to empower employee efforts to meet the challenges of the new organization. Celebrating small victories will fuel future efforts and buffer failures. Performance reviews, hiring selection, and promotions must reinforce the traits that make the organization more adaptable and ready for change. Finally, leadership must remain focused and recognize that institutionalizing change requires patience. While it may take the disruption of leader succession 18 months to three years to calm, substantive organizational change may take five to ten years to become part of the organizational culture. Organizational leaders, managers, and rank-in-file must learn to accept such a time frame or fall prey to the disenchantment which comes from moving from program to program without seeing fruition of any of them. This literature speaks well to the challenges facing the Libertyville Fire Department and many of our colleagues in the fire service as we approach the new millennium.

If our organizational change program follows the tenets found in the literature, there is reason to believe that it will be successful.

2. What is the level of change-readiness or change-acceptance of the active members of the Libertyville Fire Department at the onset of this study?

As mentioned earlier, two surveys were administered to the active members of the Department in early September, the onset of this study. Each member was assigned a number which would be used

throughout the study. The surveys were graded twice by different individuals to insure their accuracy. Tabulated scores were entered into a Quattro Pro v.7 spreadsheet. These results are reported in Table 1 under the columns designated Test 1.1 and Test 2.1 of the Reaction to Change Inventory and the Type O/Type D Questionnaire respectively. Sub-grouping found within the table consists of :

<u>Table #1 Sub-Groups</u>	<u>ID Designation</u>
Chief Officers & Fire Marshal (FM)	1-5
Lieutenants	6-11
Private Service FF/PMs	12-20
Civil Service FF/PMs	21-39

Of the 35 respondents, the mean for the Reaction to Change Inventory was 43.14 which corresponds to a high level of support for change. The application of descriptive statistics for this measure while available in Table 1 is of questionable significance. Since respondents are allowed the latitude of responding to as many word associations as they desire, an inordinate range exists.

The mean for the Type O/Type D Questionnaire was 39.68 and corresponds to a Moderate Type O. The standard deviation is 5.53. Scores of subgroups were:

<u>Sub-Group</u>	<u>Test 1.1</u>	<u>Test 2.1</u>
Chief Officers & FM	52	40.6
Lieutenants	22	41.5
Private Service FF/PM	51	39
Civil Service FF/PM	44	39

Using the Reaction to Change Inventory, the chiefs and the private service FF/PMs are seen as

most change ready groups with a strong support for change. Next there is the civil service FF/PMs who also show a strong support for change but less than the first two groups. On the other hand, the lieutenants are seen as demonstrating moderate support for change, and are located near the lower end of that scale. Table 1 follows:

Change Readiness of the Libertyville Fire Department Reaction to Change (Test 1) and Type O/Type D (Test 2)				
I.D.	Test 1.1	Test 2.1	Test 1.2	Test 2.2
1	70	43	60	44
2	60	32	70	33
3	50	30	60	34
4	80	45	70	42
5	-30	53	-20	49
6	20	33	70	31
7	--	--	--	--
8	60	43	70	48
9	20	40	40	37
10	50	44	40	43
11	--	--	20	41.5
12	10	34	--	--
13	30	37	100	43
14	--	--	90	28
15	--	--	-30	59
16	90	37	10	45
17	20	36	--	--
18	50	36	30	40
19	80	42	80	41

Change Readiness of the Libertyville Fire Department Reaction to Change (Test 1) and Type O/Type D (Test 2)				
20	80	30	50	34
21	-20	53	--	--
22	70	43	40	43
23	50	39	--	--
24	80	38	80	36
25	20	38	-10	44
26	10	42	30	43
27	10	38	30	35
28	30	46	30	44
29	0	43	10	48
30	60	42	50	42
31	70	30	--	--
32	70	40	80	41
33	20	43	10	44
34	80	41	40	40
35	20	44	40	45
36	40	41	50	42
37	60	38	60	36
38	30	41	20	39
39	70	34	--	--

Column 1.1 Column 2.1 Column 1.2 Column 2.2

Mean	43.14286	39.68571	42.8125	41.07813
Standard Error	5.198116	0.934647	5.55824	1.058784
Median	50	40	40	42
Mode	20	43	40	43
Standard Deviation	30.75247	5.529448	31.44215	=5.989385
Variance	945.7143	30.57479	988.6089	35.87273

Range	120	23	23	31
Minimum	-30	30	-30	28
Maximum	90	53	100	59
Sum	1510	1389	1370	1314.5
Count	35	35	32	32
Confidence Level (0.95)	10.188	1.832	10.893	1.838
Pearson's Corr for Test 1.1 & 2.1	-0.40395	Pearson's Corr for Test 1.2 & 2.2		-0.60416

Table 1.

Using the Type O/Type D Questionnaire, all four groups scored closely as Moderate Type O. Those so designated view change as natural and they are patient and understanding with the consequences.

However, they sometimes need a long time to recover after adversity or disappointment.

While these two descriptions depict organizational members who seem change ready they differ in degree. A Pearsons Correlation was performed on the data and found to be -0.40395, showing little or no correlation between the two measures.

3. What is the level of change-readiness or change acceptance of these members following an intervention designed to enhance these characteristics?

During the months of September, October and November 1998, civil service, full-time officers and firefighter/paramedics performed a SWOT analysis of the Departments strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. While a content analysis of this effort is summarized in Appendix C, both the greatest weakness and strength of the Department were noted to be its personnel. Morale was waning, interpersonal squabbling was distracting as was inter-shift rivalries. A minority expressed a mistrust of management and thought their work was demeaning. Simultaneously, the youth, enthusiasm, talent, commitment, and even the leadership and management of the Department were cited as its major strengths. The Chief introduced each meeting, led opening comments, and then facilitated the ensuing

discussion. Particular effort was made to listen, to encourage openness, and to respond affirmatively. Where simple solutions were forthcoming, changes were instituted in short order and their success celebrated at the next meeting. For instance, during the discussion regarding weaknesses, many members expressed concern that all the changes toward marketing the Department had come at the expense of training. Training normally occurred after lunch and employees suggested that it be allowed to be scheduled first thing in the morning. By the next meeting, the change had been instituted and a particular effort made to positively reinforce not only the product but also the process.

Following the meetings of the SWOT effort, all employees were again surveyed, including the private contractual firefighter-paramedics who did not participate in SWOT. The surveys were also graded twice by different individuals to insure their accuracy. Tabulated scores were entered into the original Quattro Pro v.7 spreadsheet. These results are reported in Table 1 under the columns designated Test 1.2 and Test 2.2 of the Reaction to Change Inventory and the Type O/Type D Questionnaire respectively. Of the 32 respondents, the mean for the Reaction to Change Inventory was now 42.81 which again corresponds to a high level of support for change.

The mean for the Type O/Type D Questionnaire was now 41.078 and corresponds again to a Moderate Type O. The standard deviation is 5.989. Scores of subgroups were:

<u>Sub-Group</u>	<u>Test 1.2</u>	<u>Test 2.2</u>
Chief Officers & FM	57	37.66
Lieutenants	23	42.66
Private Service FF/PM	42.85	41
Civil Service FF/PM	47.5	41.16

Using the Reaction to Change Inventory, the chiefs now singularly are seen as most change ready group with a strong support for change. Rather than due to the SWOT process, it is far more likely that loss of two respondents at the time of the surveys was a more reasonable cause for the increase. Next there is the civil service FF/PMs and private service FF/PMs show a strong support for change but less than the chiefs. Again, the lieutenants are seen as demonstrating moderate support for change, and are located near the lower end of that scale.

Using the Type O/Type D Questionnaire, all four groups again scored closely as Moderate Type O. Restating, those so designated view change as natural and they are patient and understanding with the consequences. However, they sometimes need a long time to recover after adversity or disappointment.

Once again, these two descriptions depict organizational members who seem change ready but they reflect differing degrees of readiness. A Pearsons Correlation was performed on the data and found now to be -0.60416 , showing somewhat more correlation between the two measures, but still lacking significance.

The data appears to consistently find that the Libertyville Fire Department is a change-ready organization, with strong support for this position from the top. What is less clear is whether the intervention of the SWOT had any significant impact. Considering the means, standard deviations, and confidence intervals of the results, descriptive statistics would imply that no significant change occurred.

On the other hand, when viewing individual scores, there may be evidence of individual impact. Since the literature suggests that building a supportive coalition is critical, and since there is a desire to have a 1:10 ratio of supportive employees throughout the organization, these individual impacts may be far

more important than a descriptive statistic to the overall health of the organization.

DISCUSSION

The historical analysis in this research project suggested that a number of events over a relatively short period of time have caused instability within the Libertyville Fire department over the last three years. The literature supports the serious impact that broken leadership, or leadership succession, can have on an organization. During the SWOT discussions, civil service personnel relayed the perceived threat that private contractual personnel were a threat to their jobs, and the literature is ripe with the problems caused when a workforce perceives that it is about to be downsized or re-engineered. The department has been organized around, and follows a tradition of, a command and control hierarchical structure which the literature has suggested is resistant to the types of open communication, employee participation and empowerment that is necessary for a change-ready organization.

The surveys administered during this research project suggest that the leadership of the organization, as defined by its chief officers, are the most change-ready in the organization and that overall both instruments imply that the organization as a whole is generally change-ready. This is consistent with the findings of others who report that adaptive organizations get to that status by top/down initiatives. These include “walking the talk”, celebrating small victories, reinforcing core values, and hiring and promoting personnel with the right traits. Prior to this study, the leadership of the department began open and frank weekly meetings which included mission and vision reassessment. They instituted two recognition programs, one for the exemplary and one for the simple day-to-day acts of kindness that affirm all of us. They altered annual performance evaluations to reflect the incorporation

of core values, and have tripled the importance of these factors in promotional processes. That the literature of organizational change would speak directly to these efforts as change enhancing, after they were instituted, is testament to the positive impact that leadership has had upon the organization to date. One can only imagine what behaviors may have ensued had the members of the department encountered the most recent assault to their status quo - the privatization of Station #3. On the other hand, any change can produce stress and during SWOT it was also discovered that a number of those aforementioned efforts to enhance our adaptability actually met with resistance themselves. It was learned that at least one strategy of the union movement was to preserve the status quo, not only regarding privatization but also promotions, performance and a number of personnel issues. Whether this is contradictory to the fact that our surveys suggest that we are adaptable, or that there is a limit to our adaptability that we are approaching can only be hypothesized.

The literature also suggested that organizational leadership needed to listen, be open to employee participation, and evoke vision and mission in face-to-face as well as large-scale events. The principle behind evoking the SWOT process was to enhance meaningful bilateral communication. Since the survey data does not support this singular effort over a three month period should not be a great surprise (although it would have been a welcome one!). The literature suggests that substantive organization change takes years; there are no quick fixes or magic bullets. On the other hand, the process is sound and, at least in the subjective opinion of the author, the effort was worthwhile. When external changes are at hand, there may be a tendency for the chief to address them at their source - externally. Failure to communicate to the employees at this time can be misinterpreted, and a regular program of SWOT analysis and other similar ventures would be beneficial.

The literature meets the survey data at one final juncture when the subgroup of Lieutenants is considered. The survey suggests that they trail the rest of the department in their change-readiness. They have been thrust from the rank-in-file into management only recently. What they might have perceived the position to be is evolving every day as does the organization, so they have yet no “roots”. Moreover, the literature suggests that they are integral to the adaptive organization. The are the daily management contacts and their communication methods are mostly face-to-face. Employees will look to them for guidance. Therefore it is important that this group be targeted to enhance those traits that will help them succeed in the new organization. More than their own issues are at stake.

The implications to the organization are clear. The Libertyville Fire department must continue on its path of incorporating a change-ready philosophy. The privatization issue is nether ephemeral nor easily remediated via labor negotiations. Leadership must step up its effort now that the issues are delineated, but must recognize that a long term consistent effort is required. Certain personality traits may lend themselves to this philosophy more than others, and new candidates should be screened at time of employment. Performance evaluations and promotion processes must stay the course despite resistance to demonstrate organizational commitment as well as select the right leaders for the evolving organization. The message must continue through the use of the newsletter, reward systems, SWOT, and perhaps semi-annual large events (i.e whole department meetings, retreats etc.). All members of the department must appreciate the need for patience. We will all have to cope with uncertainty. As some members of the department aggressively struggle to preserve the status quo, leaders has sometime responded defensively and negatively. Espousing the opportunities that lie in change, all members need to work toward a more optimistic approach to the matter.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Through both the literature search and evaluative analysis conducted in this project, a number of recommendations can be suggested that could improve the change-readiness of the Libertyville Fire Department.

First, it is clear that the greatest changes that the department have encountered in the last three years have been unforeseen and unplanned. Therefore, the concept of planned change and the management of resistance would be considered less appropriate than the concept of developing an adaptive organization. This would be an organization prepared to respond to both anticipated and non-anticipated changes. The literature suggests that this may be a more fortuitous position to take in any case. Organizational change in this context is transformational, not incremental, and the responsibility for developing this type of organization rests squarely with the leader.

Second, to achieve such an adaptive organizational transformation, the leader must espouse a vision and a mission which inspire the organization's members. From the variety of responses encountered in the SWOT process, it would appear that this is an area Libertyville Fire Department needs to improve upon. Greater clarity and a more communicative effort is necessary. Initially, this effort needs to be directed toward the department's senior managers in order to establish a guiding coalition.

Third, the survey suggests that the department's Lieutenant's are lagging in their change-readiness relative to the rest of the department. Because of the importance of these managers to the adaptive process it is important to enhance those traits required to promote the change orientation. While it could be argued that theirs is simply a maturation problem which will correct itself with time, the strains that the department is now undergoing denies this option. The chief officers will need to

concentrate particularly with this cohort by listening, empowering, and reinforcing change-ready traits aggressively.

Finally, to diminish the adverse impact of leadership succession, the department should implement a scheme of officer and personnel shift rotations to diminish the importance of some of the personal relationships between staff and administration. This will help to diminish the presence of political and power shifts at the time of succession. Also, the chief officers should continue meeting weekly in an effort to consolidate their management styles and discretion in an effort to present a more consistent and unified front. These meetings should also be used to aid in self- and peer-assessment regarding the chiefs commitment to transformational change and “walking the talk”.

In closing it should be noted that even though the Libertyville Fire Department measures well in its change-readiness, instability by outside forces continue to throw it into chaos. Ongoing efforts like those described in this research project must continue. The literature and research certainly offer a plethora of additional recommendations, however, these aforementioned recommendations summarize what the author believes to be the most important. These certainly pertain to Libertyville Fire Department’s experience, although as the literature suggests, they would certainly apply to numerous other organizations as well. The relative importance and interplay of the variables will vary from organization to organization, and the reader is cautioned that there will be no universals while seeking to create the adaptive organization.

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REACTION TO CHANGE INVENTORY

Instructions: From the list of 30 words below, circle/underline the words you most frequently associate with change.

Adjust	Different	Opportunity
Alter	Disruption	Rebirth
Ambiguity	Exciting	Replace
Anxiety	Fear	Revise
Better	Fun	Stress
Challenging	Grow	Transfer
Chance	Improve	Transition
Concern	Learn	Uncertainty
Death	Modify	Upheaval
Deteriorate	New	Vary

REACTION TO CHANGE INVENTORY

Instructions: Add the values of all the words that you circled/underlined to obtain your total score. Compare your score with the scale listed below.

Adjust	(0)	Different	(0)	Opportunity	(+10)
Alter	(0)	Disruption	(-10)	Rebirth	(+10)
Ambiguity	(-10)	Exciting	(+10)	Replace	(0)
Anxiety	(-10)	Fear	(-10)	Revise	(0)
Better	(+10)	Fun	(+10)	Stress	(-10)
Challenging	(+10)	Grow	(+10)	Transfer	(0)
Chance	(0)	Improve	(+10)	Transition	(0)
Concern	(-10)	Learn	(+10)	Uncertainty	(-10)
Death	(-10)	Modify	(0)	Upheaval	(-10)
Deteriorate	(-10)	New	(+10)	Vary	(0)

SCALE

Score of

Indicates

40 and above
 between 20 and 30
 between -10 and 10
 between -20 and -30
 -40 and below

Strong support for change
 Moderate support for change
 Willingness to comply with change
 Moderate resistance to change
 Strong resistance to change

THE TYPE O/TYPE D QUESTIONNAIRE

Instructions: Check (√) the box that indicates your response to each of the statements.

	Strongly Agree	←————→		Strongly Disagree	
1. Change is threatening.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
2. Change is a normal and natural part of life.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
3. Change offers opportunities and challenges.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
4. I have an overarching purpose in my life.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
5. Although I strive for perfection, I accept that it is impossible.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
6. Change makes me feel insecure and uncertain.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
7. Whenever I am faced with change, I try to anticipate the sources of resistance to it.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
8. I have no problem with tapping the special skills of those around me.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
9. Many changes are the result of personal vendettas.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
10. Life is supposed to be filled with choices that produce even more demanding challenges.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
11. The cliché, "All comes to those who wait" describes my philosophy about life.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
12. Life is unpredictable, confusing and contradictory.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
13. The discomfort of change is just part of the adjustment process.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Type O/Type D

Questionnaire

14. When I feel angry and frustrated I take it out on others.
15. My problem-solving mode is triggered by disruption.
16. Bureaucracies cannot really be changed.
17. Change initiatives will always be mismanaged.
18. Any attempt at change merely triggers organizational inefficiency and ineffectiveness.

	Strongly Agree				Strongly Disagree

RATING

Total Score: _____

18

90

Type O

Type D

Opportunity-Oriented

Danger-oriented

INTERPRETATION

Rating of 18 - 35: Highly Type O; interprets the world as multifaceted and overlapping; maintains a strong purpose or vision that helps during times of change; has a high tolerance for ambiguity; manages many simultaneous tasks and demands successfully; takes risks in spite of potentially negative consequences.

Rating of 36 - 53: Moderately Type O; predominately views disruptions as a natural result of the changing world, but sometimes needs a long recovery time after adversity or disappointment; exhibits patience, understanding, and humor when dealing with change; fails to ask for assistance from others when it is needed.

Rating of 54 - 71: Moderately Type D; believes there are usually lessons to be learned from challenges, but lacks an overriding purpose and the ability to stay focused; questions and modifies (when necessary) his/her own assumptions or frames of reference; becomes confused when faced with confusing information.

Rating of 72 - 90: Highly Type D; expects the future to be orderly and predictable and sees major change as uncomfortable and something to avoid; feels victimized during change and fails to break from established way of seeing/doing things.

4) After reflecting on your values, goals, and style, write yourself a personal prescription indicating specifically what you are going to do to manage your time more effectively on the job.

1) Stop/Do Less of.....

2) Start/Do More of.....

3) Continue to do.....

Use the back of this page or additional pages if you wish to express any additional information that will help the organization meet your professional goals.

Appendix C - SWOT Content Analysis

Departmental "Strengths" Content Analysis
Fall 1998

	Member Responses
3) Personnel professionalism, dedication, "young"	27
4) Officers management, leadership, direction	7
5) Equipment	7
6) Education	6
7) Reputation public relations	5
8) Support emotional (1) financial (3)	4
9) Respect	3
10) Teamwork	3
11) Progressive willingness to change & grow	2
12) Quality of Care	2
13) Goal Sharing	1

Departmental Weaknesses Content Analysis*
Summer 1998

		Member Response
1)	There is a lack of manpower and time to do assigned tasks.	15
2)	There is a problem with personal attitude, respect, and/or morale.	14
3)	Communications need to improve.	6
4)	Training of personnel needs to improve.	5
5)	Management needs to improve.	2
6)	The Department needs to keep up with changing technologies.	2
7)	The budget is too limiting.	2
8)	Politics are affecting the Department.	1
9)	There is a need for more utility vehicles.	1

*28 Full time members responded with up to three weaknesses given per member. Appendix C - SWOT Content Analysis

Departmental Opportunities Content Analysis
Fall 1998

New Equipment & Technologies	7
Increased & Specialized Training	6
Public Education Programs	4
Promotion	4
Growth of Community & Need for Services, Rescue	4
Growth of Department, Youth of Department	4
Education	3
Public Opinion & Support	3
Becoming a “Leader” in our Trade & Community	3
Maintaining Fire Department Traditions	2
Improve ISO Rating	2
Personnel Eagerness, Willingness, Morale	2
Improved Fire Dispatch	1
Utilize FireHouse Software	1
Improve Physical Fitness	1
Improve Safety	1
Look for New Ideas	1
Job Security	1

Departmental Threats Content Analysis
Fall 1998

from Outside the Department

Loss of Village Revenue	5
Changes to Village Board (new faces, change in support, change in politics)	4
Village - District Separation	3
Tax Caps	2

from Inside the Department

Privatization	
Stability of Occupation	6
PSI	5
Morale (work ethics, attitudes, egos)	5
Unionization	4
Downsizing	3
Lack of Manpower & Training	3
More Specialized Responsibilities	2
Change (social, traditions)	2
Decrease in Fire Calls	1
Increase Cost of Service	1
More Dangerous Buildings to Fight Fires	1