

**PLANNING FOR DECONSOLIDATION OF
A DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY**

EXECUTIVE PLANNING

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ABSTRACT

When the city manager of Eugene, Oregon decided to divide the Department of Public Safety into separate Police and Fire Departments, a planning process was set in motion to accomplish this change. The purpose of this study was to examine that process. An evaluative research methodology was used to determine the planning process that was used, to ascertain the effectiveness of the process, and to determine types of evaluation to be used in determining the success of the deconsolidation.

The members of the deconsolidation planning team were surveyed to collect their thoughts, suggestions and other comments and ideas regarding the process. The following recommendations were made regarding planning for deconsolidation: (1) The participants on the planning team should come from positions of decision-making authority within the areas they represent; (2) The team should be composed primarily of those who will have to live with the outcome; (3) The team needs to have clearly stated goals and objectives; (4) The city manager and/or council should think through the goals, objectives, constraints and expectations before giving the assignment; (5) A system of evaluation should be designed; and (6) The newly formed departments should consider strategic planning to set their new direction.

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INTRODUCTION

Planning is a critical part of any major organizational change. When the city manager of Eugene, Oregon decided to divide that city's Department of Public Safety into separate police and fire departments, a planning process was set in motion to accomplish this change. While there is a substantial body of research reported on public safety consolidation, there is very little on the reverse process, "deconsolidation."

The purpose of this study is to describe the planning process used in this deconsolidation effort, evaluate the effectiveness of the process, and make recommendations for other public safety organizations which may encounter similar challenges.

The study uses an evaluative research methodology. The research questions to be answered are:

1. What planning process was used to design and implement the separation of a Department of Public Safety in Eugene, Oregon into separate fire and police departments?
2. How effective was the planning process that was used in this reorganization?
3. What types of evaluation should be used to determine the success of the deconsolidation?

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

The National Fire Academy's *Executive Planning* course discusses skills which are essential in the successful management of fire department programs and organization. While some of the techniques discussed are specific to certain functions such as equipment acquisition, the planning function emphasized in the course easily applies to any change or program to be implemented. This applied research project examines the planning process used in the implementation of the separation of the Department of Public Safety (DPS) of the City of Eugene, Oregon, into the Eugene Police Department and the Eugene Fire and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Department.

Historical Background

In 1985, the city manager of Eugene directed the city's police and fire departments to consolidate, becoming the Department of Public Safety. This was done ostensibly in order to streamline the operations of the two departments, develop shared administrative support functions, and resolve some political problems in the organization.

It is important to point out that police and fire operations were at no time consolidated. These functions maintained separate personnel who were not cross-trained. The new department did not have cross-functional public safety officers. Police officers have always done police work, and firefighters have always performed fire and EMS work.

The DPS took on the following organizational structure. The fire chief headed the Division of Fire & EMS, and the police chief headed the Division of Police Services. Both

of these positions become deputy directors reporting to the new director of DPS. A third functional division, Municipal Court, was also brought into the department and was administered by a deputy director. Two other divisions were created to provide support to the three operational divisions. The Administrative Services Division included the central business functions of finance, budget, payroll and personnel management, as well as the Training Section for Police, Fire & EMS, and 9-1-1 Communications. The Technical Services Division included emergency communications, records and data services.

Identity problems plagued the DPS throughout its existence. Although the consolidated DPS existed for 12 years, it is questionable whether it ever became truly unified. Line firefighters and police officers continued to refer to their divisions as the Fire Department and the Police Department long after those departments ceased to exist.

In addition, the police and fire chiefs found difficulties in the reporting structure. For example, the fire training officer reported to the Administrative Services Division manager, not to the fire chief. The emergency communications manager reported to the Technical Services Division manager, not to the police chief or the fire chief. In essence, these support divisions acquired positions parallel and equal to the functional divisions.

It is not clear whether any attempt was made to evaluate the success of the consolidation. Therefore, it is not known if the move saved money, cost money, improved services or damaged them.

In 1997, the new city manager announced that the DPS would again be divided into the Police Department and the Fire & EMS Department. Municipal Court would become part of another city department, Administrative Services.

In announcing her decision, the city manager gave two primary reasons for making this change:

Creating separate departments will give me the chance to have closer interaction with staff on the policy and operational questions facing these two vital public services. As we move toward community-based government, it will be important to have both Police and Fire as part of the City's management team. Another benefit of this move is that it will also increase the stature of these operations in the community (V. Elmer, E-mail communication to City of Eugene employees, July 15, 1997).

Planning for Organizational Change

Whenever a significant change is to occur in an organization, planning plays an important role in the success of that change. While the time frame for implementation of this change was short, a planning process was outlined, with constraints, goals and expectations of the city manager.

Organizational constraints set forth by the city manager were as follows:

Police and Fire/EMS are to be separate departments reporting directing to the City Manager. Police and Fire/EMS call taking and dispatching will remain consolidated in the Central Lane Communications Center, and the deconsolidation plan will include a recommendation on Communications Center organizational structure and reporting relationships. The plan will also include recommendations on organizational structure and reporting relationships for the other two Technical Services Division functions, Records and Operations Analysis, and for all the Administrative Services Division functions. The Municipal Court Division will become a part of the City's Administrative Services Department and is not to be included in this plan (Public Safety Department Deconsolidation Plan, Draft Proposal, July 21, 1997).

The deconsolidation planning team was selected by the DPS management team (director and deputy directors). The planning team consisted of the following members:

- Director of Public Safety, team leader
- Acting DPS Administrative Services Division manager
- DPS Technical Services Division manager
- Operations Chief, Fire & EMS
- Operations Support Captain, Police
- Director, Human Resources & Risk Management Department

- Facilitator from City's Administrative Services Department, Service Improvement staff

The planning process outlined by the team consisted of four components:

1. Communications to DPS employees and other stakeholders throughout the planning and implementation process;
2. The planning process itself, which in turn has six components;
3. A deconsolidation recommendation to the city manager;
4. Phased implementation of deconsolidation decisions, to be completed before 1/1/98 (Public Safety Department Deconsolidation Plan, Draft Proposal, July 21, 1997).

The planning process (item 2 above) was further divided into six process components:

1. Identify key stakeholders.
2. Agree upon desired outcomes for deconsolidation plan.
3. Identify current or future organizational needs in deconsolidation.
4. Consult with DPS leadership group, unions, external stakeholders on information generated in Steps A, B, C; get input.
5. Examine organizational options.
- 6.** Present recommendation to Management Team by August 26 (Public Safety Department Deconsolidation Plan, Draft Proposal, July 21, 1997).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Fire and police service consolidation has been the topic of much discussion and controversy. Most of the literature deals with pros and cons of consolidation, the types of consolidation, the politics of consolidation, and the planning and implementation of consolidation. However, very little has been written about the process of reversing consolidation, or “deconsolidation.” This section presents an overview of the types of study and literature which have predominated in the area of public safety consolidation and reorganization planning, as well as provides material for further reading in this subject area.

Hamilton (1991) presents a good description of the various forms consolidation can assume, including full, partial, selected geographical, functional and administrative consolidation. In full consolidation, all personnel are cross-trained in a fully integrated department. At the other end of the spectrum is administrative consolidation, in which police and fire functions remain separate, but are headed by a single administrator known as the public safety director. He describes functional consolidation as separate agencies which share some common functions such as communication centers, training staff and facilities, and business functions such as purchasing.

An area of considerable interest is the evaluation of consolidated public safety departments as compared to separate police and fire departments. Success of a consolidation or deconsolidation move must be evaluated in terms of the reasons for the change. In other words, if the goals of consolidation are reduced costs and improved

response times, those must be among the variables which are measured to determine the success of the consolidation.

Hamilton (1991) lists eight key ingredients that must be in place for a reasonable chance for success of police/fire consolidation. It is interesting to note that five of them could just as easily be considered necessary for a successful deconsolidation. These five are:

- Must be planned and executed carefully.
- Measurable goals and objectives.
- A plan to meet the goals and objectives.
- Full support by administration and by personnel.
- Legal questions identified and resolved.

Chelst and Matarese (1991) outline a model for forecasting the outcome of police/fire consolidations, including a mathematical methodology for predicting the impact on cost and performance of a proposed merger. However, they recognize that quantifiable factors are only part of the picture and provide this as a tool, not a definitive answer to the consolidation question.

Murphy (1991) lists numerous problems associated with consolidation, including high employee turnover, low morale, loss of experienced employees, reduction of time spent on training and public safety education, emphasis on police rather than fire functions, and excessive cross-training costs. While she describes all the various forms of

consolidation discussed by Hamilton (1991), it is apparent that here she is considering only fully consolidated public safety departments, as that is where these problems might be expected to result.

Another concern is identified by Patterson (1991) in his discussion of administration consolidation. He describes a structure in which police and fire functions are essentially separate and headed by its respective chief, and then an additional administrative layer is created with the position of director of public safety. He goes on to recommend a structure in which the department consists of three divisions: Fire operations, police operations and administrative services, which includes communications, financial services and records, and serves both police and fire.

A successful but limited consolidation of a specific function is described by Larson (1993). He tells of police and fire dispatchers in San Jose, California who share a building yet maintain their separate personnel, training and work areas. It is questionable whether this is truly a consolidated department or rather two separate departments which have worked out an arrangement to share a building and some equipment.

One of the problems often associated with police and fire consolidation is the dissimilarity of the two cultures. Cassel (1994) reports an even more unlikely combination of cultures with the merger of a fire department and a parks and recreation department. This took place in a quite small town (Grover Beach, California, population 11,024) with a relatively low demand for fire service. On closer examination, this consolidation appears to be a cost-effective but temporary step taken by a small community toward having a paid

manager for each department. In this case, the paid fire chief was given two separate departments to manage. Ultimately, as the community grows, each department will likely have its own paid director.

Another contentious combination of cultures has been reported in some Canadian cities, where fire and emergency medical services (EMS) are being newly merged (Mackay, 1997). While this particular combination has been widely accepted in the United States for many years, it is apparently a more recent challenge in Edmonton, Ottawa and Winnipeg. There the two services are seen by some as incompatible, with a great deal of resistance from both fire and EMS personnel.

At least some of the problems associated with consolidation, and, it might be assumed, deconsolidation, could be prevented or minimized with adequate planning. Snead and Porter (1996) tell of a troublesome situation in Roanoke, Virginia, where disagreement within the fire department regarding its role in EMS as well as conflicts within the EMS department between volunteers and paid personnel were creating numerous problems for management and line personnel alike. The city initiated a major planning effort to address the changing demands on these services. It was determined that the planning approach would have to achieve four goals:

1. Identify permanent, long-range solutions.
2. Assure support by all internal constituencies.
3. Eliminate divisiveness and political manipulation.

4. Meet changing service demands effectively and efficiently.

Furthermore, the question of whether strategic planning was needed was considered. The authors state that planning should be “strategic” when:

- External forces are seen as a threat to the organization.
- Rapid changes are introduced in the field.
- Traditional ways of doing things are becoming less effective.
- Existing structures and practices do not resolve problems.
- There is no agreement on where the organization is headed.

For these reasons, the city of Roanoke determined that, “this planning approach offered the city its best hope for charting the future of fire and emergency medical services” (Snead & Porter, 1996, p. 10).

It can be seen that there are many different forms of police/fire consolidation. What one writer views as consolidation might be considered by another to be only a cooperative arrangement between two departments. In addition, there are numerous ways of viewing the success of consolidation, from measurable improvements in performance and cost saving to full cultural integration of personnel.

There appear to be two significant and indisputable points here:

1. Whether some form of police/fire consolidation is appropriate or likely to succeed in a particular city depends greatly on the size, history, political environment, economic conditions and goals of that city.
2. Any type of change, whether from separate police and fire departments to a department of public safety, or the reverse, or some selective merging of functions, requires adequate planning in order to provide a smooth transition and a good chance for success.

PROCEDURES

The deconsolidation planning team consisted of a facilitator and six members selected by the director of public safety in conjunction with the deputy directors (the fire chief, the police chief, the technical services manager and the administrative services manager). The team consisted of:

- Director of Public Safety, team leader
- Acting Administrative Services Division manager
- Technical Services Division manager
- Operations Chief, Fire & EMS
- Operations Support Captain, Police

- Director, Human Resources & Risk Services Department
- Facilitator from City's Administrative Services Department, Service Improvement staff

A survey of the planning team members was conducted to ascertain their degree of satisfaction with the planning process. While this is a very small population, the survey was intended to focus on the planning team itself and the members' perceptions of how the process worked, rather than on the larger organization.

Individual interviews were considered due to the small number of people to be surveyed. However, some strong differences of opinion were anticipated, and it was believed a written questionnaire format would elicit more candid responses. A questionnaire was written and distributed to the team members as an attachment to E-mail. This questionnaire is included in Appendix A. The questionnaire was designed to gather information on the four following general issues:

1. The constraints and expectations of the planning process.
2. The dynamics of the process itself, and how it might have been affected by factors such as team make-up.
3. The outcome of the process.
4. Comments, suggestions and recommendations for improvement of the process.

The team members were asked to complete the questionnaire, print it out and return it via interdepartmental mail so as to maintain their anonymity. The position of Director of Public Safety was

eliminated with deconsolidation, and that individual is no longer employed by the City of Eugene.

Therefore, he was not asked to participate in this survey. Of the other six participants, five completed and returned their questionnaires.

Assumptions and Limitations

It was assumed that all respondents would answer honestly and directly. Since all the respondents were known to the investigator, it was hoped they would wish to be cooperative and helpful, yet candid in their responses.

The two major limitations of this study were the extremely small group and the focus on one process in one organization. There are many other variables which can affect the success and outcome of any planning process.

RESULTS

Of the six questionnaires distributed to planning team members, five were completed and returned, one from the Fire & EMS representative, two from other divisions within DPS, and two from other City departments. By process of elimination, it can be seen that the Police representative did not return his questionnaire.

Interestingly, all team members within DPS indicated their job position had changed significantly and for the better since deconsolidation. This is despite the fact that two team members' positions (in addition to the DPS director) were eliminated through DPS deconsolidation, and they had since found other positions with the City of Eugene.

There was not general agreement regarding the length of time to plan for deconsolidation. One respondent indicated the two months given for planning was more than enough time, three believed it was about right, and one said it was not enough time.

All respondents believed that all stakeholders were identified and represented in the planning process. Two of the members felt that not all team members had decision-making authority in their respective divisions. Both went on to elaborate that since the police chief was not present, many issues had to be revisited after the police captain on the team had discussed those issues with the chief.

All team members indicated that some power struggle had occurred in the process, but there was not a consensus as to the cause or the solution. One suggested the direct involvement of the police and fire chiefs would have helped; one would have preferred a larger work group; one said they needed

more time to work through the issues; one thought mediation from the city manager's office would have helped; and one blamed the police for dominating and the DPS director for allowing this to happen.

Four of the five respondents said the financial constraints imposed by the city manager were met with difficulty, while one felt they were not met, as some costs were ultimately shifted to another fund to maintain the current level of service.

The group expressed some degree of frustration given the resources and information with which they had to work. No one stated they had all they needed. Two respondents indicated the constraints and demands on the team changed during the process, when the city manager decided to move the department's public information officer, along with his salary and related costs, to her office, leaving the team struggling to find a way to replace that resource.

There was no agreement as to the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning process. The non-DPS team members thought it went well. The support services members acknowledged that a great deal of time and energy went into dividing up those functions and resources, but felt it was necessary. The Fire & EMS representative stated that had the two chiefs been at the table, all available resources could have been divided more quickly and appropriately.

All respondents were "somewhat satisfied" with the resulting plan. They all agreed that the severe constraints imposed by the city manager left little room to maneuver and gave the team a very difficult task. Yet they felt that they had been successful in developing a plan all stakeholders could accept.

Four out of five indicated that money would not be saved through the deconsolidation plan. Only the Fire & EMS representative thought it would.

None of the respondents claimed any knowledge of a plan to evaluate the success of the deconsolidation. The two support services managers stated their views that the purpose of deconsolidation was to satisfy identity needs of the Police and Fire & EMS Divisions and political goals of the city manager; therefore, no evaluation was even discussed by the team.

However, all members had ideas about what should be evaluated. The Fire & EMS representative suggested a job assessment on division and department head positions, as well as clerical support, to determine if each stand-alone department had maintained enough capacity to perform effectively under deconsolidation. The non-DPS participants recommended looking at employee morale and ultimately basing the success on the City's ability to fully actualize community policing. The support services representatives proposed examining costs and personnel management factors, such as overtime, labor relations, budget compliance, and equipment planning, acquisition and maintenance.

Summary comments by the respondents revealed some very personal perspectives on the entire process and outcome. One of the support services representatives stated her disagreement with the decision to place communications under the administration of the Police Department, as that had not worked well in the past (pre-consolidation). The other support services representative lamented the loss of identity and status for administrative and technical personnel, who will now be located within the Police and/or Fire & EMS Departments, rather than functioning at a level equal to them. The opposite

sentiment was expressed by the Fire & EMS representative, who felt that Police and Fire & EMS should have been the main decision-makers and that they were outnumbered by the support services.

DISCUSSION

Any time people enter a group process, they bring their individual backgrounds, experiences and current situations with them. Even with such a small group as was surveyed in this study, it is apparent there were sharply different perceptions and perspectives on this planning process. These differences can largely be attributed to the various job positions of the team members within the City organization and within the DPS.

When the DPS was formed in 1985, the former Police and Fire Departments suffered a perceived loss of power and identity. At the same time, services that had been subordinate to these departments, such as training, dispatch and communications, records and reporting, and administrative services, were formed into two divisions which had equal status with Police and Fire & EMS within DPS. While this led to further loss of control by Police and Fire & EMS management, it created new entities which came to have their own identities, the Technical Services Division and the Administrative Services Division. When the time came to deconsolidate into Police and Fire & EMS Departments in 1997, these support services found it uncomfortable to go back to being subordinate to the operations functions of police and fire.

The planning team consisted of only two representatives from Police and Fire & EMS. They felt outnumbered by the support services representatives, and the support service representatives felt disenfranchised by the fact that DPS was being disbanded. It is no wonder there were conflicts during the planning process and perceptions by the various team members varied so widely.

The Fire & EMS representative identified a significant problem when he pointed out that the majority of the team members would not have to live with the decisions made in this process. Of the six members and one facilitator who participated in the process, only two currently hold positions in the Police or Fire & EMS Department. While it can be beneficial to include a neutral facilitator, people who are at risk of losing their jobs may find it difficult to keep the organization's future needs in focus. To their credit, the individuals who participated reportedly did manage to maintain their professionalism and contribute in a positive and productive manner.

One difficulty cited by several team members was the changing constraints imposed by the city manager. The initial constraints were demanding in that the deconsolidation was to be cost-neutral after removing the salary and benefits of the director's position, yet all current service levels were to be maintained. During the planning process, the city manager decided to remove the public information officer position from DPS and reassign that position to her office. This now left the deconsolidation planning committee with a new demand, to continue to provide this function without his salary and related costs in their budget.

The most glaring omission is any discussion of how to evaluate the success of the plan and of deconsolidation. While it may not have been possible to fully address this aspect of deconsolidation

planning in the short time frame provided, it is somewhat surprising that it was not even discussed. Furthermore, the planning team had been given only very general reasons and goals for the deconsolidation. Since the two reasons given by the city manager were (1) to provide more direct interaction with the police and fire chiefs and (2) to increase the stature of these operations in the community, there is little left to evaluate. She did provide certain constraints, e.g., the result must be cost-neutral after removing the salary and related costs of the director and the public information officer.

There may be further reasons the city manager chose to deconsolidate DPS at this time. She was new to her position and may have wanted to make a major change which was almost certain to be well received by the City Council and the largest City department. With the recent passage of two ballot measures in the State of Oregon, revenues were decreased significantly. Therefore, a change that saves money by eliminating administrative positions is very likely to be popular with the general public. If these were the underlying reasons for deconsolidating, she may have seen no further need to evaluate the success of deconsolidation.

However, the questions will be asked, “Was deconsolidation a good idea? Is it working? Is it successful?” The team members presented some thoughtful suggestions for evaluating deconsolidation, such as performing job assessments to determine if each department has adequate personnel resources and administrative support. It might also be an opportune time to evaluate the overall performance and service levels of the Police and Fire & EMS Departments. The National Fire Service Accreditation Program provides a comprehensive instrument for such an assessment (IAFC, 1995).

Another opportunity for the newly independent departments is strategic planning. While strategic planning is beyond the scope of the deconsolidation planning team, such a recommendation to the emerging departments might be well received. As the existing structures are being changed, each department may now see a need to establish consensus on its future direction.

RECOMMENDATIONS

While this study focused on a specific planning team for deconsolidation, several recommendations can be drawn from the findings which are applicable to any public safety department planning to deconsolidate.

First, all participants should have decision-making authority within the areas they represent. Otherwise, they will be continually delaying decisions until they get the approval of those with that authority. The team's progress will be slowed as issues must be revisited.

Second, the team should be composed primarily of those who will have to live with the outcome of the process. If positions are being eliminated, it can be helpful to have input from the individuals currently in those positions. However, giving those individuals decision-making power over the remaining positions is not the way to achieve the best outcome for the resulting departments.

Third, the team needs to have clearly stated goals and objectives. This should include the reasons the city manager or council is making this particular change at this time.

Fourth, the city manager and/or council should think through the goals, objectives, constraints, and expectations before giving the assignment. Changing the rules in the midst of the planning process, especially if the time frame is short, not only adds to the demands and stress of the team, but also can create feelings of mistrust and suspicion about which changes might be next.

Fifth, design a system of evaluation for the outcome. Ideally, this should be closely tied to the goals and objectives specified by the city manager or council. It would logically examine costs pre- and post-deconsolidation, personnel issues, support service capacity of the emerging departments, and service levels. Even if specific goals and objectives have not been provided by the city manager or council, this is an opportune time for each department to assess its current levels of service to establish a new baseline.

And finally, consider strategic planning. When existing structures and practices are being changed, it may be an appropriate time to examine the organization as a whole and come to a new consensus on its direction.

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APPENDIX A

Deconsolidation Planning Process Questionnaire

1. Which of the following most closely indicates your Division or Department before deconsolidation? (These categories are deliberately broad in order to maintain your anonymity.)

 Police or Fire/EMS Division
 Other Division within DPS
 Other City Department

2. Has your job position changed significantly as a result of deconsolidation?

 Yes No

- 2a. If you answered “yes,” do you feel this change was for the better, the worse, or about the same (as it affects you)?

 Better
 Worse
 About the same

3. In July the City Manager announced her intention to deconsolidate DPS and asked for a plan to be submitted to her by September 5, so that deconsolidation could occur by the end of the year. Do you feel this time frame was appropriate to do a good job?

 It was more than enough time.
 It was about right.
 It was not enough time.

4. Do you feel the composition of the planning team was appropriate in the following ways?
 - a. Were all stakeholders identified and represented?

 Yes No

 - b. Did team members have decision-making authority in their respective divisions?

 Yes No

- c. Are there any other aspects of the make-up of the planning team on which you would like to comment?
5. Whenever resources are to be divided and reallocated, there is the potential for a significant power struggle. Do you feel the team members acted fairly, reasonably and with the best overall outcome in mind?
- _____ Yes, at all times
_____ Yes, in most cases
_____ Sometimes
_____ Not often
_____ No, and there was a significant power struggle.
- 5a. How could this aspect of the planning process have been improved?
6. The city manager indicated she wanted the deconsolidation to be at least cost-neutral, *after* removing the salary and related costs of the DPS Director. Was this constraint
- _____ Easily met
_____ Met with difficulty
_____ Not able to be met
7. Did the team have all the information and resources it needed to do the job?
- _____ Yes
_____ For the most part
_____ No
- 7a. What else would you have liked to see the team provided with in order to do its job more efficiently and effectively (e.g., time, resources, participants, etc.)?

8. Do you feel the planning process was efficient and effective?
- Yes
 Somewhat
 No
- 8a. How do you think it could have been streamlined for greater efficiency?
9. Do you feel the team's priorities were appropriately set and maintained? In other words, did the team spend most of its time and energy on the most important or most difficult issues?
10. Are you satisfied with the resulting plan?
- Very satisfied
 Somewhat satisfied
 Not satisfied
11. What changes would you have liked to see different from the final plan presented to the city manager?
12. One of the goals expressed by the city manager was to save money through deconsolidation. Do you think this has been or will be accomplished?
- Yes
 No
 I don't know at this point.
13. How will the success of the deconsolidation be evaluated?

14. Are there any other ways you would like to see it evaluated?

15. Are there any additional comments you care to make?