The Decision Making and Planning Process:
A Leadership Approach to Utilizing The
Task Groups and Committee Concept

Executive Leadership

By: Tony G. Jackson, Assistant Chief
Birmingham Fire and Rescue Service
Birmingham, Alabama

ABSTRACT

The problem identified in this research project was that the task groups and

committees that were used by the Birmingham Fire and Rescue Service to assist the

executive staff in their decision making and planning processes were not generating

the productivity or operating at the efficiency level that the administration desired.

The main problem areas concerning the use of task groups and committees in the

department's decision making and planning process were:

- The groups' and committees' inability to provide recommendations,

  plans and proposals in a timely manner.

- The managerial and decision making abilities of the members and

  group leaders themselves.

- The evident presence of "Groupthink" in the recommendations

  and proposals that were presented for approval.

The purpose of this research project is to identify managerial methods that will assist task

groups and committees in providing more effective recommendations, plans and proposals when

routine and critical decisions are necessary. The information gathered in this research project is

intended to assist in developing a structured model and workable procedures that will serve as a

standard for managing task groups and standing committees. The research focuses on finding

ways to alleviate the problems that hinder task group and committee productivity and efficiency.

The research method used was an action research methodology. The action research

methodology was necessary to show how the application of obtained information, structured

guidelines, continuous training and leadership development are essential to solving the problem

that faced the Birmingham Fire and Rescue Service. The action research method is very well

suited as a means for answering the questions that were derived from the identified problem. The

research questions identified to be answered are:

- Are the committee or task group's decision making and planning concept applicable

  to addressing complex or crisis situations?

- What effect does task group and committee member commitment too cooperative

  and organizational goals have on the task group or committee's productivity?

- Can the development of a decision making model be a useful instrument for improving

  task group and committee performance?

- Can organizational leaders provide relevant ways of teaching effective decision

  making skills to task group and committee members.

Current publications, a population survey and face-to-fact interviews that pertained to

task group and committee decision making and planning processes were used to compile the data

that went into the development of this research project. This data was used to establish

managerial methods that are intended to enhance the productivity of task groups and committees during decision making or planning processes.

The results of this research revealed pertinent points that should be utilized by fire department leaders to increase the effectiveness of the task groups and committees when they are used in the decision making and planning process. The findings of this research project revealed the following:

- Committee member commitments to cooperative and organizational goals have a definite effect on the productivity of task group and committee productivity.

- The committee or task group decision making and planning process is applicable and has been used during complex and crisis situations.

- The literature review and the population survey reveals that a structured decision making model can be useful to organizations during decision making and planning processes.

- The population survey and the personnel interviews vividly reflected the importance and the need for continuous training for task group and committee members.

The recommendations of this research project evolved from findings that reflected a salient need to employ training procedures, designate a knowledgeable and capable facilitator or facilitators to direct and oversee task group and committee assignments and projects.

Another recommendation of this research project was to provide continuous training and educational programs to provide further management and leadership development for task group and committee members and group leaders. In addition to this, the recommendations provide strong evidence that by developing a decision making model can be effective in assisting the organization's task groups and committees in contributing to the successful accomplishment of the organization's goals and mission. The recommendations were intended to provide the readers of this research project with a means to replicate the findings as well as to provide basic guidelines that can be utilized to resolve similar problems that may arise in other organizations.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

With the onset of a very complex and changing public environment, the fire service of today is faced with the task of providing service to its customers through dynamic, competent and productive leadership principles. The demands from the external environment has caused the fire service to take proactive and diversified measures to meet the challenges of private business (privatization of fire suppression and medical service delivery), dwindling city economics, budgetary justifications, governmental mandates, growing public apathy and political agendas that do not align with the mission and goals of fire service organizations.

Since these are multiple issues and varied in nature, the fire department leaders of today are often compelled to rely on the decision-making abilities of subordinate members of their organizations. Assistance in the decision making process are often delegated to task groups or committees in order to relieve an overbearing and unrealistic expectation that can be placed on the Fire Chief. These committees are utilized both externally and internally. The Birmingham Fire and Rescue Service participates in and holds positions in various decision making external committees such as SMICC (State Medical Control Committee) and CAFCA (Central Alabama Fire Chiefs Association). Internally, the Birmingham Fire and Rescue Service has established nineteen (19) standing committees and various ad hoc committees and task groups to handle routine and unanticipated occurrences. The utilization of committees and task groups are not

however, an instant cure all to supplement the Fire Chiefs decision-making responsibilities. There

is some inherent management considerations that must be addressed in order to make the use of

task groups and committees' effective managerial instruments.

The problem that the Birmingham Fire and Rescue Service encountered is that the task

groups and committees did not provide the decision-making alternatives necessary to produce

effective strategies and plans for the organization. The main problem areas concerning the use of

task groups and committees in the department's decision making process was due to the

following factors:

- The groups and committees inability to provide recommendations, plans and

  proposals in a timely manner.

- The managerial and decision making abilities of the members and group leaders

  themselves.

- The evident presence of "Groupthink" in the recommendations and   proposals that

  were presented for approval.

The most prevailing factor that inhibited the effectiveness of the group decision making

process was the dominant existence of "Groupthink" in the decisions, recommendations, plans

and proposals that were submitted to the Executive Staff for approval and implementation. The

"Groupthink Albatross" was also a contributing cause to the problem of not providing assigned

task in a timely manner. Resubmission

of recommendations, proposals, plans and group decisions cost the department valuable time, and

time wasted often cost the organization's financial loss.

The purpose of this research project is to identify managerial methods that will assist task

groups and committees in providing more effective recommendations, plans and proposals when

routine and critical decisions are necessary. This research will focus on finding ways to alleviate

the problems that hinder task group and committee productivity and efficiency.   In addition to

this, the information gathered in this research project is intended to assist in developing a

structured model and workable procedures that will serve as a standard for managing task groups

and standing committees.

The action research methodology was used in this research project is very essential to

addressing the Birmingham Fire and Rescue Service's problem of getting efficient and effective

productivity from their appointed task groups and committees. With the commitment to apply the

group or committee concept in selected processes, action was needed to be taken to solve the

existing problems and enhance the performance of the task groups and committees for present

and future usage.

An action research methodology is necessary to show how the application of obtained

information, structured guidelines, continuous training, and leadership development are essential to

solving the problem that faced the Birmingham Fire and Rescue Service. The action research was

conducted by researching managerial literature and the writings of authors who are reputable in

the field of organizational, formal group and leadership development. In addition, the action

research utilized information gathered from other departments and individuals having direct

knowledge of the problems encountered through the use of a population survey and personal

interviews.

      With the challenge of increasing work loads that are brought about by the need to

maintain a productive and progressive organization and produce a competitive and creditable

service delivery to the customers of their localities, fire service leaders are managing these

obligations by delegating those tasks that have outgrown the productive capabilities of the

organization's hierarchy to other organizational members in the form of task groups and planning

committees. With the utilization of the task group and planning committee concept, questions

concerning the concepts feasibility and effectiveness would have to be answered. Definite

alterations needed to be made to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the decisions and

plans that the task groups and committees produced. The need to identify methods of

improvement and ways to positively impact the performance of the Birmingham Fire and Rescue

Service's task group and committee concept produced some simplistic, yet vital, questions that

has to be answered if this managerial concept was expected to produce positive results. The

action research method is very well suited as a mechanism for answering the questions that were

derived from the identified problem. The research questions identified to be answered are:

- Is the committee or task group's decision making and planning concept applicable to addressing complex or crisis situations?

- What effect does the task group and committee member commitment to cooperative and organizational goals have on the task group or committee's   productivity?

- Can the development of a decision making model be a useful instrument for improving task group and committee performance?

- Can organizational leaders provide relevant ways of teaching effective decision making skills to task group and committee members?

These questions establish the principle component that necessitates the use of an action research methodology to confront the problems of the Birmingham Fire and Rescue Service. That principle component was the activity or dynamics that existed within the task groups and committees the perpetuated ineffectual results. The need for organizational leaders to enact aggressive well structured initiatives to ensure that their task groups and committees produce intended results is best emphasized by some of the problems that exist when using the group/committee concept in the decision making process. This need is saliently revealed in Dean Tjosvold's book; "Working Together to Get Things Done." Tjosvold (1986) points this out in the following statement:

Forming teams to make complex decisions does not automatically result in effective

problem solving. Indeed, sometimes people working together reinforce their biases and

enhance their limitations. They may develop groupthink conformity that results in fiasco

that severely damages the company. Alternatively, individuals use the group to push for

their own self-interest at the expense of the company's welfare (p.96).This statement by

Tjosvold emphasizes just one component of the total group or committee process that

inevitably creates problems for fire department leaders when they utilize groups and

committees in their decision making process. The leaders that have elected to rely on the

task group or committee concept to assist the organization's management process will be

faced with managing this component as well as trying to structure the most effective upper

level management team available to drive their organizations in a proactive manner to meet

the varied challenges facing the fire and rescue service today.

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

The decision by the Birmingham Fire and Rescue to incorporate several task groups and committees in its decision making and planning process was brought on by two main factors. The first factor was the organization's new commitment to establishing and maintaining an organizational mission that would set the department on a proactive, progressive and interactive management course that is intended to provide its citizenry and customers with an optimum level of service delivery. This intended optimum level of service delivery epitomizes the Fire Chief's philosophy and newly adopted mission statement that both represents a significant paradigm shift from traditional fire service operational procedures to more visionary concepts that emphasized more intense fire prevention concepts and practices, a dedication to community and public intervention programs, intensified and dynamic organizational marketing procedures and internal managerial growth development. The second factor that dictated this decentralization of responsibility was rapid emergence of challenges from the external environment. These challenges came from outside interest groups such as private ambulance services, sub-contractors employed by the city, increased requirements and mandates from governing agencies and boards, state and regional agencies, budgetary constraints and a very uncertain political arena.

All of these factors significantly contributed to the need for establishing and utilizing task groups and committees to assist the Fire Chief and executive staff in their decision making and

planning processes. This move to incorporate more of the organization's members in this customized total quality management process had the potential of providing the assistance necessary to help the organization accomplish its objectives, goals, and overall mission while consistently adding to organizational efficiency, productivity and visionary growth.

Prior to embarking on this management direction, the vast majority of the decision making and organizational planning was restricted to a few people in administrative positions. The new leadership philosophy to significantly increase member participation in the decision making and planning process was a welcomed innovation by many of the organization's members.   Nearly all of the employees that were asked to participate in standing committees and task groups readily and enthusiastically agreed and participated. While all indicators pointed to positive results being accomplished through the use of this management concept, and while top management was committed to and supportive of using this process, unforeseen problems existed within the overall concept that plagued and even stymied some major organizational initiative, which potentially could have led to devastating consequences. These problems that existed with the Birmingham Fire and Rescue Service's use of task groups and committees in the planning and decision-making process dictated the need for this research project.

Starting in 1993 and lasting over the last four years the Birmingham Fire and Rescue Service began it's policy to establish essential standing committees and other committees and task groups designed to assist the organization in the successful accomplishment of the organization's

objectives, goals and missions. The committees that were established as part of the Birmingham

Fire and Rescue Services Standing Committee Policy were as follows:

- Strategic Plan Work Group Assignments, which consisted of eleven

sub-committees.

- Affirmative Action Committee

- Specification Committee for Apparatus

- Fit Check Advisory Committee

- Emergency Medical Service Committee

- Occupational Health & Safety Committee

- Training Committee

- Research and Development Committee

- Fire Station Design and Construction Sub-Committee

- Uniform and Personal Protective Equipment Committee

- MISC – Automation Committee

- Strategic Plan Analysis Committee

- Labor Management Committee

- Accident Review Panel

- Vacation Leave Bank Policy Committee

- Recruit Interview Committee

- Lieutenant Promotional Review Panel Committee

- Captain Promotional Review Panel Committee

- Battalion Chief Promotional Review Panel Committee

In addition to the standing committees, other ad hoc and temporary task groups were

formed to address issues that occurred as a result of imposed mandates, innovative concepts and

external challenges from local government, private business and the public. Committees and task

groups such as the Fire Department Accreditation Committee was formed to research the

department's credentials and develop plans to implement the standards required to gain

accreditation.

Another initiative implemented by the Birmingham Fire and Rescue Service that utilized

the task group or committee approach was the McGruff Safe Place Program. A task group was

formed for the purpose of formally incorporating the Birmingham Fire and Rescue Service into the

National McGruff Safe House/Safe Place Program. This initiative was a joint effort by the fire

department and police department to address a community need and increase the marketability of

the two agencies to the public that they serve.

The Personnel Evaluation task group was formed to develop departmental task

statements and performance standards for all employees of the Birmingham Fire and Rescue

Service. The formulation of this committee was due to a mandate by the Jefferson County

Personnel Board, which is the authorizing agency for all municipalities under their supervision.

This group was comprised of representatives from each section, bureau and battalion in the

organization so that every position within the organization would be adequately addressed.

On the surface, the utilization of these task groups and committees to assist the

organization's leadership in their decision making and planning process appeared to be a definite

answer to the organization's managerial needs. These ad hoc and standing committees were

ineffective in delivering the desired results sought by the organization's leadership. This

ineffectiveness was the result of deadline overruns, unworkable plans due to traditional thinking

and lack of vision, unclear or nebulous direction and a lack of pre-training or personal knowledge

about the management of task group and committees in the planning and decision-making

process.

Currently the Birmingham and Rescue Service continues in its commitment to utilize

committees and task groups to assist the Fire and the Executive Staff in the organization's

decision-making and planning process. This commitment is largely due to the organization's

management of total quality management and continuous improvement.

It is the belief of the Birmingham Fire and Rescue Service top administrators that by

including every level of the organization's personnel in the decision making and planning process,

vertical and horizontal lines of communication will be improved significantly. In addition to

improving organizational communication, the group and committee decision making and planning

process is expected to promote organizational team building and a sense of ownership in the

vision, goals and mission of the organization. With this commitment, and the objectives that were established for the organization's task groups and committees it is easy to see why it is important for the task groups and committees to be successful in the decision making and planning process.

The fundamental purpose for this research is to provide information, recommendations and relevant guidelines that will assist the Fire Chief and the Executive Staff in obtaining the optimum level of decision-making and planning effectiveness from its committees and task groups.

This research is very pertinent to the Executive Leadership course in that it relates directly with the Developing Decision-making Skills section of the course. A significant portion of this course centered on the impact that formal groups and committees can have on the organizational decision-making and planning process. In the task group/committee decision-making and planning process, the leadership of fire and rescue organizations are reliant upon those assigned committees to be productive in the managerial process. The Executive Leadership course utilized case studies pertaining to incidents that involved the group/committee decision-making process on a national level. The course focused on such situations as the decisions made in the Bay of Pigs incident, the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Space Shuttle Challenger explosion. Two of these group/committee decision making processes ended with catastrophic results. This research is intended to provide recommendations and action plans to implement the necessary to alleviate the problems that are presently impeding the effective use of task groups and committees in the Birmingham Fire and Rescue Services management process.

The problems that were encountered by the Fire Department Accreditation Committee, the McGruff Place Planning Committee and the Personnel Evaluation Task Group were some of the most salient ones. While there were other groups that experienced some of the same or similar problems, the obstacles that impeded the effective decision making and planning processes of these three groups accentuated the importance of defining and implementing the actions necessary to acquire positive productivity from the department's committees and task group assignments.

Individual members of these committees and groups have identified specific concerns that they feel have hindered the effectiveness of the committee/group decision-making process. Chief Steve Carroll, Fire Marshall for the Birmingham Fire and Rescue Service and a member of the Fire Department Accreditation Committee, along with Airport Chief George Gunn, McGruff Place Committee, and Battalion Chief Don Thompson, Personnel Evaluation Formulation task group, contribute relevant facts that offers credibility to the background and significance of the identified problems. The opinions of these individuals all refer to the internal management, control and resources provided to the committees and groups that tended to impede optimum effectiveness.

Yet, the research of one of the standing committees, the Uniform and Personnel Protective Equipment Sub-Committee, that is responsible for establishing grooming standards, reveal a somewhat different perspective of how the productivity of that group was effected by top

management's role in their decision making and recommendation process. Lieutenant Beverly L.

Thedford, a member of the committee, provided some very pertinent information concerning how

some members of that committee fell victim to what was perceived to be an autocratic

management atmosphere.

Further details concerning these committee members' interviews will be discussed in the

Procedures and Recommendations section of this research project. Each of these committee

members offered relevant advise that they believed would be of assistance in alleviating the

problems that they identified. Their observations and opinions are essential to the credibility of the

background and significance of this project since they can provide the knowledge that was gained

through experience that is necessary to assist in developing the action methodology to address this

problem.

LITERARY REVIEW

The literature review identified several principles and opinions that were very useful in

identifying the aspects necessary to develop an action research methodology for incorporating and

using committees and task groups in the organizational decision making and planning process.

Although none of the literature specifically pertained to the fire and rescue service, the literature

and articles researched provided numerous guidelines and information concerning how the

committee or task group concept should be utilized and maintained. Nearly all of the literature

that was researched made reference to the problems that an organization can expect to encounter

when using committees and task groups in their decision making and planning process. This

section will review the literature and information that is related to developing an Action Research

Methodology for the effective use of committees and task groups in the organization's decision

making and planning process.

Beneficial Perspectives:

The literature review revealed some salient beneficial factors associated with the use of

task groups and committees in modern organizational life. We also must recognize that there are

a significant amount of problems that exist when groups and committees are used in organizational

decision-making and planning processes. However, all of the reviewed literature indicated task

groups and committees were both necessary and beneficial to assist organizational leaders in their

managerial processes.

Barron and Greenberg (1990, pg. 497) states that

"There is little doubt that there is much to be gained from using decision-making groups.

Several potential advantages of this approach may be identified. First, bringing people

together may increase the amount of knowledge and information available for making

good decisions In other words, maybe a pooling of resources. A related benefit is that in

decision-making groups there can be a specialization of labor".

In another study, productivity and personnel motivation are found to be improved by the

use of what the author terms as teams and groups in the management process. The study found

that teams are practical ways to enhance motivation and productivity, solve problems, and

improve the quality of work life through developing cooperative work. Experience and research

both indicate that groups – when managed well and used appropriately, play a very important

role in organizations (Tjosvold,1986).

The writings of these authors, Barron and Greenberg, and Tjosvold were the most

significant in pointing out the benefits associated with using the task group or committee concept in

the organizational decision-making process. These two books were not the only ones that related

to the beneficial factors of utilizing this concept It is important to note however that these two

books did dwell more on the positive aspects that task groups and committees may have on an

organization's decision-making process than did the other literature that was reviewed.

Establishing Cooperative Goals

One important factor that the researched literature revealed was the need to develop cooperative goals among task group and committee members. The individuals that are selected by the organization's leaders as participants and leaders of task groups and committees must develop a sense of cooperation in order to achieve organizational goals and overall mission.

Cooperative dependence is critical so that employees in work groups and task forces, within and between departments and business units, exchange their information, ideas, and assistance to get things done (Tjosvold, 1986). This principle of cooperation and teamwork is an asset in growth and development of the organization's leader. Phillips (1992), in his book about the leadership abilities of Abraham Lincoln wrote: Establishing goals and gaining their acceptance from subordinates is critical for effective leadership. Goals unify people, motivate them and focus their talent and energy.

Effective Modeling

A literature review was also conducted to ascertain the validity of establishing a decision-making model that can be applied to the task group and committee concept. This research focused on how the beneficial aspects of a general decision-making or problem solving model is used in today's organizational management process.

Many scientists find it useful to conceptualize the process of decision making as a series of steps through which groups or individuals go to solve problems. A general model of the steps in the decision-making process can help us understand the complex nature of organizational decision making (Barron and Greenberg, 1990).

The literature review identified three areas that are important when constructing a model to be used in the task group and committee decision making or planning process: Individual judgment, theory vs. model, and utilizing models to promote consistency (Hersey and Blanchard, 1993; Low-Beer, 1995; Makridakis, 1990).

Individual Judgment.

Unlike other tasks, there may exist no criterion for determining whether a single choice or judgment is correct, since the response is based in part on personal opinion or preferences. It is possible, however, to impose a mathematical or logical structure on the task that defines the consistency of a set of responses (Low-Beer, 1995).

Theory vs. Model.

A theory attempts to explain why things happen as they do As such, it is not designed to recreate events. A model, on the other hand, is a pattern of already existing events that can be learned and therefore repeated (Hersey and Blanchard, 1993).

Utilizing Models to Promote Consistency.

Repetitive, routine decisions can be improved if inconsistency is removed. People are

often unable or unwilling to apply the same criteria or procedures when making similar decisions

(Makridakis, 1990). In addition to this Makrisdakis (1990) writes that inconsistency can be

avoided by formalizing the decision-making process

(in our day it is called building expert systems).

Problems Associated With Using Task Groups And Committees

In The Decision-Making And Planning Process.

Perhaps the best known disadvantage of group decision making is the extraordinary

amount of time it takes. Research studies show that even problem-solving groups are clearly

superior to individuals with regard to arriving at correct solutions with the fewest number of

errors, the groups generally take longer than individuals do (Wheeler and Jonis, 1980).

Many persons complain that groups do not develop reasonable, straightforward solutions

because team members continually compromise to appease each other rather than base their

decisions on the merits of the case (Tjosvold, 1986).

Groups operate under groupthink when their members are so concerned with being too

harsh in their judgments of other group members that objectivity in problem solving is lost (Certo,

1992).

Allinson (1993) found that the decision-making process can be seen to have separate and contributing defects as it related to an actual group/committee concept: (1) The atmosphere of the decision making process, which was not conducive to good decision-making; (2) The lack of standardized criteria command in the final decision making process; (3) The lack of a spelled out decision-making mechanism (such as unanimous vote, secret ballot, majority vote, consensus, etc.).

Strategies For Success:

Although committees have become a commonly accepted management tool, managerial action taken to establish and run committees is a major variable in determining their degree of success (Certo, 1992). Hersey and Blanchard (1993) suggest that managers can be most effective in evaluating and solving performance problems by developing an ACHIEVE model to determine why problems have occurred.

Managers must use an integrated approach to develop strong feelings of pulling together. Employees need consistent guidance, cues and information; they need to understand that by working together they can be successful (Tjosvold, 1986).

A multiple advocacy system in which the pros and cons of different alternatives are debated within the cohesive group helps insure that they are adequately considered (Wheeler and Jonis 1980). Remember: groupthink arises in response to group members' reluctance to "rock

the boat". Group leaders should encourage members to be skeptical of all solutions and avoid

reaching premature agreements (Barron and Greenberg, 1990).

Tagliere (1992) suggest that one way to adjust group member competition and dissension

is to try to make decisions by consensus instead of by democratic or majority rule. By working

cooperatively and using their power positively managers and employees are able to dig into

issues, pool their information, integrate ideas and create useful

solutions.

PROCEDURES

The research procedures that were employed to prepare this project utilized research

survey instruments. The first area utilized was a literature review that began at the Learning

Resource Center, located on the campus of the National Emergency Training Center in

Emmittsburg, Maryland during July of 1997. Additional literature research was conducted at the

Central Birmingham Public Library in Birmingham, Alabama between July, 1997 and October,

1997. Personal books owned by the author of this research project were also used to provide

supporting information and relevant facts.

Another instrument utilized in this project was the face-to-face interview processed that was designed to obtain first hand knowledge and information from the Birmingham Fire and Rescue Service personnel who were active participants in either the task group or standing committee decision making and planning process. Interviews were conducted with the following committee participants:

Lieutenant Beverly L. Thedford, a member of the department's Uniform and Grooming Standards standing committee. Lieutenant Thedford was interviewed on November 18, 1997, to ascertain her insight into how individual committee member ideas and recommendations were being received and considered by committee chairpersons and executive staff members. Department Fire Marshall Steve Carroll was interviewed on November 14, 1997, concerning the effect that inequitable as well as equitable task assignments can have on the task group or committee's productivity.

Chief of Training Dwayne A. Murray, a member of the department's Apparatus Specifications Committee and the chairperson of the Captains Promotional Review Panel and the department's Training Committee was interviewed on October 22, 1997, to get an indication of the knowledge level and acquired training that committee members should have to promote efficient decision making and planning processes.

Battalion Chief Donald B. Thompson who chaired the Personnel Evaluation Formulation task group was interviewed on November 19, 1997, concerning task group and committee time

management, and the existence of adequate information available to assist in formulating effective

decisions and recommendations.

Airport Chief George Gunn was a member of the McGruff Place task group was

interviewed on November 21, 1997. Chief Gunn's interview provided insight into the need to

select committee and group participants that has an interest and a desire to assist in accomplishing

the assigned task.

The third survey instrument used to prepare this project was a structured population

survey. A questionnaire was distributed to thirty-six (36) fire departments that serve populations

of seventy-five thousand (75,000) people or more. The reason that a population of seventy-five

thousand was selected as a minimum number is because the author of this research feels that a

moderate to heavy population area would produce more incidents, situations and developments

that would necessitate interaction and involvement by fire service organizations.

Survey Description and Purpose:

The survey questions were developed from literature sources that pertained to the

elements that related to the importance of using and developing the task group and process. The

survey questions were intended to project the following information:

Questions 1 through 5 in Section I were designed to ascertain the extent of task group

and committee usage among the designated research population and the decision making style that

is most likely to be used by those organizations that were surveyed.

Questions 1 through 7 in Section II were proposed to gain a reasonable knowledge of the

type situations that may be managed by the Group/Committee decision-making process. In

addition, this section also is intended to rate the level of effectiveness of

a task group or committee decision-making and planning process.

Questions 1 through 6 in Section III were designed to examine the feasibility of using

structured procedures or designed decision-making and planning models as a guide for task

groups and committees when they are utilized by the organization.

Survey Analysis

Twenty-five our of thirty-six questionnaires were returned. The information that the

surveys yielded was compiled, analyzed and computed to determine if the task group or

committee concepts are acceptable and is being utilized among those organizations selected to

participate in the survey.

Assumptions

It was assumed that a high degree of effort would be made by the respondents to answer

the survey questions accurately and honestly. It was also assumed that the survey questions were

presented in a manner that would allow for the questions to be easily understood. The final

assumption was that a sufficient amount of survey questionnaires would be returned so that data

computations could be made in order to effectively analyze the identified problems. However,

only one of the three assumptions identified could be confirmed. The assumption relating to the

amount of questionnaires returned is applied in the results section of this research project.

RESULTS

The data compilation and analysis of this research project provided answers to the

questions identified in this research project. The action research study revealed pertinent points

that should be utilized by fire department leaders to increase the effectiveness of task groups and

committees when they are used in the decision making and planning process.

Participant and Data Contributions

The individuals that were interviewed all had experience and expertise concerning the

subject matter that they were asked to respond to. In addition they were all active members of

the Birmingham Fire and Rescue Service. The individuals that participated in this study either had

served or was presently serving on more than one committee or task group at the time of this

study.

The population survey used in this research project included thirty-six fire departments

that served populations of seventy-five thousand or more. Of the thirty-six fire departments

selected to participate in the study, twenty-five contributed by completing the questionnaires and

returning them. Questionnaires were mailed to the following departments:

1. Tucson, Arizona	13. Boise, Idaho	25. Reno, Nevada
2. Tempe, Arizona	14. Aurora, Illinois	26. Trenton, New Jersey
3. Fort Smith, Arkansas	15. Decatur, Illinois	27. Albany, New York
4. Burbank, California	16. Gary Indiana	28. Charlotte, North Carolina
5. Compton, California	17. Iowa City, Iowa	29. Akron, Ohio
6. Bridgeport, Connecticut	18. Sioux City, Iowa	30. Canton, Ohio
7. Hartford, Connecticut	19. Waterloo, Iowa	31. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
8. Wilmington, Delaware	20. Topeka, Kansas	32. Charleston, So. Carolina
9. Boca Raton, Florida	21. Lexington, Kentucky	33. Abilene, Texas
10. Cape Coral, Florida	22. Kenner, Louisiana	34. Greenbay Wisconsin
11. Macon , Georgia	23. Flint, Michigan	35. Little Rock, Arkansas
12. Savannah, Georgia	24. Lansing, Michigan	36. Shreveport, Louisiana

The survey analysis reveals that all (100%) of the twenty-five organizations that returned

the survey questionnaires used some type of committee or task groups in their decision-making

and planning process. The three survey categories addressed in the questionnaire produced the

following results:

I.   Decision-making Styles

- Eleven respondents indicated that their department preferred to use a decision-

    making style where the department head shares information with subordinate

    officers, solicit recommendations, and then mutually decide on a course of action.

- Twelve (12) organizations utilized standing committees, task forces, or work groups,

    etc. that are empowered to research situations, plan a course of action and submit

    the recommended plans to the department head.

- One (1) organization indicated that the department head relied mostly on the expertise

    of selected individuals, seek their input and makes decisions based on their

    recommendations.

- One (1) organization indicated that the department head use pre-established

    decision making guidelines or models to decide a course of action or arrive at a

    consensus.

II.   Situations That May Reflect Task Group and Committee Effectiveness:

Employee relation problems; Not effective   6

    Moderately effective   18   Very effective   1

- Policy or procedure violations;   Not effective   0

Moderately effective _____12_ Very effective ____13_

- Policy and plans development;   Not effective _____0_

  Moderately effective _____0_ Very effective ____25__

- Promotional process;   Not effective ____11_

  Moderately effective _____13_ Very effective _____1_

- Organizational staffing and personnel assignments:

  Not effective ____2_   Moderately effective ____22_

  Very effective ____3_

III.   The Decision Making and Planning Process:

- Organizational financial studies, budgetary process and capital expenditures;

  Not effective ___0_ Moderately effective ___6_

  Very effective ___21_

- Relationship and interaction with the external environment;

  Not effective ___4_   Moderately effective ___12_

  Very effective ___9_

  Computation: Not effective ___41__   Moderately effective ___83_

  Very effective ___72__.

IV.   Utilization of A Structural Process or Model

- Utilizes a structured model; Yes __15_   No: ___10_

- Provide structured training and education; Yes: ___23_ No: ___2_.

- Authority to develop their own plans, guidelines or procedures;

  Yes: ___14_. No: ___2_.

  Sometimes, depending on the situation: ___9_.

- Level of involvement by the department head or the executive staff;

    Never involved: 0 .   Always involved: 6 .

    Depends upon the situation: 19 .

- Result of using loose controls, relaxed guidelines, and ad hoc planning;

    Little or no difference in productivity: 1 .

    Creativity flourishes, group decision making is effective: 1 .

    The decision-making process becomes stagnant, resulting in

    completion over-runs and ineffective recommendations: 15 .

    Programs and committee assignments "die": 8 .

This section of the survey shows that the participants feel that structured models, applied

training, reasonable controls and planned involvement on the part of the organization's

leaders provide for productive growth and development of the task group and committee

decision-making process.

Information Provided By Those Directly Involved.

The interviews that were conducted with the task group and committee members

of the Birmingham Fire and Rescue Service provided very relevant information concerning

the problems that can possibly arise when task groups and committees are used by

organization leaders in the decision-making and planning process.

In addition, the committee members that were interviewed provided recommendations and suggestions as to how the task groups and committees can work more cohesively with other agency representatives and the fire department's executive staff members. They were also instrumental in identify the problem areas that helped create obstacles to a creative and productive decision making atmosphere.

Chief Donald B. Thompson cites information flow problems between the committee and upper level management as being a major contributing factor to the excessive time span needed to complete their task group's assignment. Chief Thompson also reported that he and the group members did not adequately employ a sound time management system during their project assignment.

Chief Steve Carroll reported that the validity of the information, determining the maximum accuracy of the findings and facilitating the information that is gathered as being areas of concern. In addition, Chief Carroll indicated he felt that although the committee which he participated in was successful in accomplishing it's assignment, such factors as the members misinterpretation of the project's intent, and deadlines for data collection not being met left much room for improvement.

Lieutenant Beverly L. Thedford reported that she thought that the committees' effectiveness was often impeded by the committee or task group's chairperson unwilling to consider individual committee members'

recommendations. Lieutenant Thedford's interview revealed that some committee members felt that their ideas or recommendations were not being considered. Mrs. Thedford stated that this opinion was due to the fact that many times when the committee would reach a consensus on a particular plan of action, their recommendation would not be accepted by the committee chairperson.

Chief George Gunn cited that member apathy was apparent on the McGruff Place Committee, of which he was a member. In particular, Chief Gunn reported that an employee of another city agency openly and candidly displayed resistive actions to being assigned to the task group. Chief Gunn said that the actions and statements of the group members eventually became disruptive to the goals and mission of the task group.

Questions Concerning the Use of Taskgroups and Committees In Organizational Decision-making and Planning Procedures:

1. Is the committee or task group decision-making and planning concept applicable to addressing complex or crisis situations?

According to Allinson (1993): A crisis atmosphere is one in which a wrong decision is very likely to have grave consequences, and is one in which a decision must be made under a great deal of some kind of pressure, usually to meet a fixed deadline, and therefore, must be made in a hurry. Frequently, decisions made in a crisis atmosphere are made at irregular hours and may even include irregular to unethical steps in the decision-making process.

While this statement by Allinson exemplifies the impact that a wrong decision can have on the outcome of a crisis incident, organizational leaders still rely on groups and committees to produce efficient and effective plans and decisions.

Managers generally agree that committees have several uses in organizations. One is that committees can improve the quality of decision-making. As more people become involved in making a decision, the strengths and weaknesses of that decision tend to be discussed in more detail, and the quality of the decision tends to increase (Certo, 1992).

The opinion by these authors emphasizes how essential it is to make the right decisions when an organization is faced with a crisis or a very challenging situation. In addition, the statements indicate that committees and task groups can be effective in producing the type of decisions that are necessary to mitigate challenging or crisis situations.

2. What effect does task group and committee member commitment to cooperative and organizational goals have on task group or committee's productivity?

The consequences of not having or establishing the cooperative goals among committee and group members that are necessary to accomplish organizational goals were evident in the McGruff Place task group of which members of the Birmingham Fire and Rescue Service was part of. In the early stages of task group's work process, the group experienced incohesiveness, dissension and apathy and little, if any productivity. Chief George Gunn of the Birmingham Fire

and Rescue Service reported that the problems basically stemmed from one committee member's behavior during meetings and planning sessions, which served to negatively influence other members' actions and involvement in the groups' assignment. The need to establish cooperative goals among groups is essential to developing an effective decision-making process and to the accomplishment of organizational goals. Tjosvold (1986), says that cooperation promotes all aspects of effective problem-solving. Decision makers with cooperative goals combine their ideas to create high-quality solutions, understand and become committed to the solution, make problem-solving a rich experience, develop confidence and skills to make decisions, and accept the procedures used to arrive at the decision.

3. Can the development of a decision-making model be a useful instrument for improving task group and committee performance?

Webster (1991) describes a model as an example, pattern, exemplar, ideal mean, someone or something set before one for guidance. In light of this definition, it is practical to conclude that a structured model that is designed to enhance group and committee decision-making processes. Certo (1992), found that the use of mathematical models to investigate the decision situation is typical in management science applications. Models are constructed to represent reality and then used to determine how the real world situation might be improved.

The task group / committee disclosed that several of the departments' surveys employed

some type of decision-making model to assist them in their decision-making

and planning process.

4. Can organizational leaders provide relevant ways of teaching effective decision-making skills to

task groups and committees?

The literature review identified several planning procedures and techniques that can be

utilized by organizational leaders to provide training and instruction for group and committee

members. A personal interview of Chief Dwayne A. Murray, Chief of Training for the

Birmingham Fire and Rescue Service and a member of the Training Committee, the Apparatus

Specifications Committee and the Captain's Promotional Interview and Evaluation Committee

found that committee members that had attended some type of class or seminar where decision-

making procedures were offered, generally contributed positively to their assigned task group or

committee.

Discussion:

Effective decision-making is widely accepted as an essential mechanism when organizations are faced with incidents, situations, challenges and crises that most likely will have a definite effect on an organization. When groups and committees are utilized and depended upon to provide decisions and recommendations for routine management and crisis mitigation, Fire Departments can be gravely affected by the actions and productivity arising from those groups and committees.

The task groups and committees that are used by the Birmingham Fire and Rescue Service is a relatively new management concept to the department. Since the concept is a new one (basically four years old), this concept has experienced, as predicted, it's share of growing pains. However, today's modern fire service is confronted with a demanding public that is not willing to wait for those growing pains to subside.

Today's fire service leaders are confronted with the fact that delegation of authority is an inevitable managerial component of the fire service, and task groups and committees are often used to assist leaders in accomplishing specific goals and objectives.

The ultimate responsibility for sound, efficient and effective decision-making and planning is that of the organizations' leader. The efficient operation of the groups as well as the committees, therefore, is the ultimate responsibility of the organization's leader. While a great deal of emphasis is placed on the internal working relationships and functionality of the groups,

and the committees themselves, it is the role of the organization's leader to set the tone for developing a productive atmosphere.

A productive atmosphere is best accomplished by ensuring committee and group members that their ideas, recommendations and opinions are important and appreciated. Task group and committee members who feel that their input is at least listened to, or considered, acquire a sense of belonging and ownership in the decisions made. Those members who have shared in the development of the particular plans or decisions, then become stake-holders in the accomplishment of that specific organizational goal. Decision makers who feel respected argue logically and rationally. They accept informed, reasonable positions. They continue to believe that their goals are cooperative, are interested in the opposing view, understand it, and are open to the other person and position (Tjosvold, 1986).

The leader's role is also instrumental in promoting and nurturing creativity in committee and task group members, as well as in committee and task group chairpersons. Abraham Lincoln, the sixteenth president of the United States, was said to be masterful in the art of getting subordinates to initiate creative and innovative concepts. Leaders like Lincoln, who seek to inspire subordinates to bring forth ideas and recommendations, whether in individuals or formal groups, gain valuable allies to support organizational goals and missions. Phillips (1992), offers this insight about Lincoln's style of managing individuals and groups: In general, a lack of malice

on the part of a leader – genuine caring – inspires trust among subordinates and fosters innovative thinking. It also keeps followers from being terrified, allowing them to be themselves.

Associated Historical Events:

The impact that may occur as a result of ineffective and effective formal group decision is emphasized by the following three historical events. (1) The Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961 and (2) The Space Shuttle Challenger disaster in 1986, represented historical events that saliently demonstrated how ineffective group and committee decision-making can bring about horrendous consequences. The third event, the Cuban Missile Crisis, in 1962, demonstrated how effective formal group decision-making processes can yield positive results.

The committee that was formed by President Kennedy to plan and coordinate the Bay of Pigs Invasion, fell prey to an occurrence that is a nemesis to effective formal group decision making and planning procedures. That occurrence is known as groupthink. Groupthink occurs when a group is so cohesive that its members potentially lose sight of its ultimate goals for fear of disrupting the group itself (Baron and Greenberg, 1990).

The president and his advisers were shrewd thinkers, with well-deserved reputations as men of sound judgment, capable of critical evaluation and rational analyses. Why did they fail so badly? The answer seems to be that they fell victim to groupthink. Groupthink is evidenced by three major characteristics. One characteristic of groupthink is extreme overestimation of the

worth of the group. A second characteristic is over-rationalizations, rather than sound reasoning. The third characteristic is a defense mechanism that appears in the form of a self-imposed censorship within the group to ward off challenges to the assumptions and beliefs supporting the first two characteristics.

The Bay of Pigs disaster did not begin with the invasion of the Cuban shores, but rather it began months before, with the group that developed the plans and made the final decisions concerning the Invasion. Wheeler & Janis (1982), reported that the three main types of symptoms of groupthink are all well illustrated by the way President John F. Kennedy and his group worked on the Bay of Pigs invasion plan.

Another historical event that was the result of poor planning and decisionmaking was the Space Shuttle Challenger disaster. The Challenger disaster vividly points out how disastrous consequences can occur when organizational leaders are not willing to accept or listen to the recommendations and ideas of those to whom they have delegated the decision making and planning authority.

In the Presidential Report, the flaw in the decision-making process is considered to be a contributing cause of the Challenger disaster (Allinson, 1993). The major flaw in this decision-making process is best termed as a "non-protocol decision-making process." When committees and task groups are formed according to the expertise and abilities of the participating members,

their knowledge level concerning the particular assignment should be utilized by organizational

leaders

and not ignored. This was not the case during the meetings that were held concerning whether or

not Challenger should have launched.

Groups and committee decision-making during crisis situations may not be conducive to

effective decision-making. The decision to launch Challenger was made within a crisis

atmosphere, due in large by imposed pressure and unethical prioritization from Thiokol (the

manufacturers of the solid booster O-rings), and the executives of the Marshall Space Flight

Center. The President's Commission identifies at least two instances during the decision-making

process that the committee participants felt pressure from the Thiokol and Marshall executives.

Committee and task group members in the Birmingham Fire and Rescue Service

experience similar types of pressure from some group and committee leaders that used their

position to force committee participants to make decisions and recommendations according to

what the group leaders or chairpersons thought the executive staff wanted or was willing to hear.

The report by the President's Commission in the Challenger disaster indicates that

recommendations concerning potential danger was pushed aside in favor of a disastrous business

decision by the executives. Allinson (1993), reports that, in another place in the report, it is stated

that: "The Commission concluded that the Thiokol management reversed its position [not to

launch] and recommended the launch of 51-L, at the urging of Marshall and contrary to the views of its engineers, in order to accommodate a major customer."

Perhaps what may have been one of the most historical events to occur in the twentieth century was the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. During this crisis, group and committee decision-making procedures were put to the ultimate test. The management tactics, strategies and overall process during the crisis represented an illustration in persistence to acquire the optimum level of decision-making effectiveness from a committee or task group. Over a year earlier, a committee decision-making process, under the same Kennedy administration, ended in one of the most embarrassing debacles in the history of the United States.

The decisions made during the Cuban Missile Crisis was made in the midst of a legitimate crisis atmosphere. The group (Ex Comm) assigned to make the critical decisions and recommendations had to be controlled, coerced, and methodically guided to a consensus that was in the best interest of national security. But on the other hand, the committee had to allow the opportunity to foster creativity, offer dissenting opinions and evaluate the decisions and recommendations that are formulated. To get this committee or any committee to perform efficiently, according to these guidelines, is a challenging objective for any leader. Kennedy, however, was equal to the challenge. Obviously, learning from his past experience with the Bay of Pigs incident, President Kennedy initiated a management plan to achieve success.

Among the steps employed by President Kennedy was to appoint a strong facilitator for the group. That person was the Attorney General and the president's brother, Bobby Kennedy. This move by the president was sorely needed like some of the committees utilized by the Birmingham Fire and Rescue Service. That committee began it's assignments amidst an atmosphere of uncertainty and confusion, only to a much greater magnitude that embodied chaos. It is very important for leaders to provide a definitive direction and quality leadership for their task groups and committees. This is especially true when crisis atmospheres exist. It is well known that the President's committee had to operate for many days within a high pressure and chaotic atmosphere.

Yet, out of this chaos, a pattern did emerge; Robert Kennedy took over as discussion leader, or just whip. Necktie loosened, shirtsleeves rolled up, his fingers ever ready to jab somebody in the middle of the chest, the youthful looking RFK challenged one older speaker after another, asking questions that were pointed, even rude, and, everyone suspected, keeping a mental list of where everyone stood (Thompson, 1992).

Fire department leaders that utilize committees and task groups in the decision-making and planning process can increase the effectiveness of the group and committee concept by taking

the vital step of appointing group and committee leaders that will do the things necessary to steer

committees and task groups to a timely consensus.

The second action that President Kennedy took was to order Bobby Kennedy to get a

consensus from the group. Leaders must realize that conflict, groupthink and disagreement will

exist among groups.   President Kennedy knew this, and in part, even counted on it.

Group members do disagree, bicker, argue, and in other ways conflict with one another.

Their dependence on each other means that at times, they will have conflicts. They have opposing

positions, hidden agendas, and different ideas about how work should be done. Conflict can tear

relationships apart, delay serious work, and even prevent completion of a project (Tjosvold,

1986).

Disagreement is by itself insufficient. Decision-makers must argue, debate, and disagree

cooperatively and skillfully (Tjosvold, 1986). Assigning one person to be a devil's

advocate or everyone to take a critical evaluation role of expressing all their criticism can

reduce the chances of the group's seeking agreement too quickly (Tjosvold, 1986,

p.102).

In fire departments, as well as in other organizational arenas, the organization's leaders

can impose a great amount of pressure on group members due to their direct involvement in the

process. When an organization's leader is directly involved in group decision-making and

planning processes, detrimental effects such as groupthink

may occur.

The third action that Kennedy took was to remove himself from direct involvement with

Ex Comm, turn the reins of authority over to Bobby Kennedy, and project in appearance of being

involved in other tasks and commitments. Fursenko and Naftali (1997), gives this account of this

leadership decision. He (President Kennedy) asked his brother to call him, once the Ex Comm

had decided on a recommendation, then he would return. The President's departure gave the Ex

Comm one last chance to resolve its deep differences.

The historical events presented in this research project provide salient facts about how an

organization's group and decision-making process can be impaired by mismanagement on the

part of the organization's leader. These events also point out the need for leaders to implement

consistent action methods to ensure that their task groups and committees operate efficiently. The

events identified in this research also illustrated the positive results that will occur when leaders are

persistent in their attempts to obtain success through the committee and task group concept.

My interpretation of this study is that the study results reveal a definitive need for fire and

rescue service leaders to initiate continuous active management procedures to enhance the

effectiveness of task group and committee operations during decision-making and planning

processes. With the ever-increasing involvement between the fire serve and outside agencies, the

fire and rescue service is faced with the need to employ additional decision-making and planning

concepts. The utilization of task groups and committees are part of that concept. The research

shows that fire departments should carefully and skillfully use their groups to supplement the

management process. Furthermore, my interpretation of the research is that both the literature

review and the population survey indicates that fire department leaders should look to developing

structured models and educational procedures that can ensure continuous improvement of their

task groups and committee programs. The organizational implications of the study is that

committees and task groups are effective when organizational leaders adhere to and apply the

management procedures that are designed to assist task groups and committees in their assigned

projects. The Birmingham Fire and Rescue Service utilizes a significant amount of standing

committees and task groups in the decision-making and planning process. The Birmingham Fire

and Rescue Service, along with other fire service organizations throughout the country must be

aggressive in their approach to obtaining the optimum level of production from their task groups

and committees. For organizational leaders, this dictates that a strong formal approach to training

procedures, instilling cooperative values in group members and applying visionary concepts to the

task groups committee decision-making and planning processes.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The recommendations of this study focuses on two main areas. The three areas of interest focuses on the need for fire service organizations to establish relevant and consistent methods of ensuring the effective application of their task groups and committees during decision-making and planning processes. The three areas that this research concentrates on are:

1. Establish training or educational programs that will benefit the organization during crisis mitigations; an assistance to the personnel that are selected to lead the groups or committees, and participate as members and organizational officers for future assignments, or as instructors for task groups and committees.

The primary purpose of the training program would be to increase the productivity of the task groups and committees during project assignments. In addition to the specific purpose of a training program, the ultimate purpose of any organizational training or educational program is to contribute to the overall attainment of the organization's goals and missions.

The first step of the training process is determining the organization's training needs. Training needs are the information or skill areas of an individual or group that requires further development to increase the organizational productivity of that individual or group (Certo, 1992).

The need for training or education for task groups and committee participants is illustrated by the results of the population survey and the interviews of the Birmingham Fire and Rescue Service personnel that were directly involved in the organization's task groups and committees. The calculation of the survey questionnaires that were returned show that ninety-two percent (92%) of the respondents provided structured training and education for committees and groups in their departments. This would indicate that those respondents regard structure as a necessity to enhancing the productivity of committees and task groups.

The interviews of Battalion Chief Donald B. Thompson and Chief of Training, Dwayne A. Murray show that they consider committee and task group training as a high priority to achieving success with task groups and committees. Both Chief Murray and Chief Thompson stated that training and education for the personnel was more important than providing training for the entire membership of each group.

The training and educational classes can be provided by trained individuals that have received training themselves from an accredited source. Another method of training is to provide it through outside sources, such as management training consultants, educational institutes and training seminars. Some of the recommended training subjects or topics that should be offered are as follows:

- Team building (Working as a team)
- Problem-Solving

- Following and leading
- Creativity and Innovation
- Openness Norms
- Leadership and Managerial Styles
- Decision-Making Rules
- Time Management

The second recommendation is to assign one or more knowledgeable and capable facilitators to be used when necessary. The facilitator(s) may be a member of the department's executive staff or other personnel within the organization with the credentials and experience to handle the task In extremely critical situations, a facilitator from outside of the department may be required.

A facilitator may be appointed to watch the processes of teams; this person may not be a member of the team. In very intense situations, or in situations where all members wish to concentrate on the content of the problem or plan, it can help to have an outsider as the facilitator.

During the training stage of the team's development, the trainer usually serves as facilitator. The trainer will draw attention to positive and negative processes for the purpose of instruction, but in actual sessions, the facilitator is most concerned with the negative processes. When the facilitator spots one at work, he or she will stop the work of the team, identify the negative process, and ask the group members how they wish to deal with it. Often, it is only necessary to call attention to the negative process to make it go away.

The third and final recommendation is to construct a simple model for decision-making. A model can serve as a standard guide for task groups and committees to use during project assignments. It is important to note that not all decisions and recommendations will naturally fall in line with the steps of the developed model. Each organization should develop a model that fits the level of the expected function and output of their task groups and committees. Likewise, the number of steps and their individual purposes should be carefully evaluated before they are applied.

Many scientists find it useful to conceptualize the process of decision-making as a series of steps through which groups or individuals go to solve problems. A general model of the steps in the decision-making process can help us understand the complex nature of organizational decision making (Baron & Greenberg, 1990). An example of a possible decision-making is shown in Table 1, figure 1. Perhaps the best and simplest way to construct the decision-making model is to decide on a work procedure. Togliere (1992) identifies eight work procedures and a recommended use for each. Those steps are:

1. Creative Problem Solving: To achieve a desired end result.

2. Detective Problem Solving: To find out what happened.

3. Scientific Problem Solving: To discover a principle or law
   that explains a recurring phenomenon.

4. Predictive Problem Solving: To decide what will probably happen.

5. Corrective Problem Solving: To reestablish a previous condition.

6. Planning / Project Management: To develop and implement a

   decision or plan.

7. Presentation Planning: To develop a persuasive proposal.

8. Quality / Productivity Improvement: To ensure the meeting of

   a client or customer's requirements, or to increase production

   of a product, service, or process.

It is obvious that situations and the particular project assignments may dictate the use of any one or a portion of these work procedures. An organizational leader should, however, choose the work procedure that would be most commonly used for fire service situations and problems. It is recommended that the Planning / Project Management work procedure be used to construct a fire department's decision-making model.

Table 1, Figure 1

Time Frame	Process Steps
Beginning Date: __ / __ / __	1. Identify the problem: gather data and become thoroughly familiar with the details of the problem. Establish meeting dates and work agenda target dates.
__ / __	2. Define the objectives: What generally and specifically should the plan achieve and by when?
__ / __	3. Make task assignments: Who will do what by when? Identify the major tasks, put them into meaningful categories, prioritize the task, assign task and deadlines for each.
__ / __	4. Resources: Which resources in what amounts will be needed to complete each task or assignment. Determine When the resources will be needed.
__ / __	5. Formulate the plan: Review and evaluate individual task assignments, make corrections and improvements, complete data and draft recommendations, plan or proposal.
__ / __	6. Test / Evaluate: Test or evaluate plan with a target audience or population, get opinions of respected, knowledgeable people, compare plan with those of other similar organizations.
__ / __	7. Finished product: Submit the completed plans, recommendations or proposals for approval and implementation. Have a pre-established monitoring procedure available and ready for use.
Completion Date: __ / __ / __	

REFERENCE LIST

Allinson, R.E., (1993). Global Disasters: Inquiries Into Management

Ethics. Sinapore. Simon & Shuster

Baron, R. A., Greenberg J., (1990). Behavior In Organizations:

Understanding and Managing The Human Side Of Work. Boston. London.

Sidney. Toronto. Allyn and Bacon.

Blanchard, K., Hersey P. (1993). Management of Organizational Behavior:

Utilizing Human Resources. Englewood Cliffs, NJ. Prentice Hall, Inc.

Certo, S.C. (1992). Modern Management: Quality, Ethics, And The Global

Environment. Boston. London. Toronto.

Fursenko, A., Noftali, T. (1997). One Hell Of A GAMBLE. New York. London.

Low-Beer, F.H., (1995). Questions of Judgment: Determining What's Right.

New York. Prometheus Books.

Makridas, S.G., (1990). Forecasting, Planning and Strategy For The

21st Century. New York, N.Y. The Free Press.

Phillips, Donald T., (1992). Lincoln On Leadership. New York, N.Y.

Warner Books, Inc.

Tagliere, Daniel A., (1993). How To Meet, Think, And Work To

A Consensus. San Diego, CA. Pheiffer & Company.

Thompson, R.S., (1992). The Missals Of October. New York, N.Y.

Simon & Shuster.

Tjosvold, D., (1986). Working Together To Get Things Done: Managing

for Organizational Productivity. Lexington. Massachusetts. Toronto.

Lexington Books.

Wheeler, D., Janis, I.L., (1980). A Practical Guide for Making Decisions.

New York. London. The Free Press.

APPENDIX