EXPANDED SCOPE OF SERVICE: WHAT WENT WRONG?

ADVANCED LEADERSHIP ISSUES IN EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES

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ABSTRACT

The Central Jackson County Fire Protection District provides fire, rescue and emergency medical services to the community. In addition to emergency medical services, the fire district provides non-emergency transfer services. When the fire district implemented the non-emergency transfer service, the organization was willing to support this new challenge and to accept the problems that may come with the change. After a short time, the employees identified significant problems with the service and its operations. The employees were feeling frustrated and ignored due to the expansion of the service. In addition, feedback from personnel was being ignored.

The purpose of this research project was to identify why the expanded scope of services failed. Descriptive and action research were used to answer the following questions:

1. What part of the planning phase failed when initiating this change?

2. What part of the change management model was most important?

3. What strategies could be implemented to help facilitate a change in the future?

4. What part of the change process was most important to the employee?

A survey was developed and given to members of the organization. After compiling the information, it was found that three important elements are essential to expanded scope changes. They were employee involvement in planning, employee commitment to the change, and communications.

It was recommended that an instrument be developed to address these elements of change and incorporate it in the change process.

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INTRODUCTION

The Central Jackson County Fire Protection District provides fire, rescue and emergency medical services to the community. In addition to emergency medical services, the fire district provides non-emergency transfer services. When the fire district implemented the non-emergency transfer service, the organization was willing to support this new challenge and to accept the problems that may come with the change. After a short time, the employees began realizing significant problems with the service. The employees were feeling frustrated and ignored due to the expansion of the service. In addition, feedback from personnel was being ignored.

The purpose of this research project was to identify why the expanded scope of services failed. Descriptive and action research were used to answer the following questions:

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BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

The Central Jackson County Fire Protection District started providing an expanded scope of practice in November of 1997. The fire district started this service for several reasons. The current provider of the service went out of business due to violations with the State Bureau of EMS. Since they were no longer available to provide the service, the fire district decided to provide it. Within our community, several health care facilities exist. We have one hospital and

several nursing homes requiring non-emergency medical services. In addition to filling the needs that were lost due to the old provider, we saw a source of alternate funding. Most non-emergency transfers are initiated from a healthcare facility. Most of these transfers are covered under insurance. Collections for these transfers are approximately 95%.

To provide a steady stream of alternate funding, the fire district has entered into a contract with the local hospital to provide transfers exclusively. The fire district has pending contracts with several skilled nursing facilities in the fire district. At the time of this research project, those contracts were still under negotiations.

Since most transfers occur during normal business hours, the transfer service has allowed the fire district to add an additional ambulance. The transfer ambulance was used to handle requests for transfers. When more than one transfer at a time was needed, the other two ambulances were utilized for the transfers. However, one ambulance was always available to handle emergency calls.

Shortly after the transfer service was started and implemented, personnel started to see a need for a change with the operations of the service. The unit was being staffed with overtime personnel. The increase in call volume and the operational deficiencies lead to the problem of the employees not wanting to staff the transfer unit. After the employees felt that they were not being listened to, they stopped signing up to fill the transfer ambulance. This sent a very loud message to management.

In an attempt to remedy the problems, several avenues for resolution were explored. Management scheduled several meetings for personnel to provide feedback and to discuss problems about the transfer service. Ongoing e-mail discussions were introduced to gain insight

into the problems and to find solutions. A committee was established to tackle the problems and provide solutions. All three of these attempts at gaining solutions failed.

To fulfill the contract that the fire district had with the local hospital, the fire district had to assign personnel on a mandatory basis to staff the transfer unit. This placed the fire district in a very serious position with the City of Blue Springs. The City of Blue Springs contracts with the fire district to provide emergency medical service. The non-emergency transfer service revenues were being used to offset the costs of the emergency services.

If the city elects not to fund the non-emergency service, the growing costs of the emergency service may force the city to bid the service out to a private, commercial provider. If a commercial provider is allowed to provide the service, the fire district would suffer a tremendous blow. The fire district would lose 10 paramedics, two firefighters and an assistant chief. But the biggest blow would be the continued struggle of justifying the existence of the fire district.

Another factor which lead to the problem with the transfer service was the fact the fire district was in contract negotiations with its bargaining unit. This provided additional strain on the change.

The impact of this problem made management change its direction and look at other options. The first goal was to have an eight hour ambulance for the transfer service. With these problems however, management decided that the only way to make the service work would be to get a 24 hour ambulance. This additional unit would be used as an additional emergency unit and the three units together would handle the transfers.

By solving the problem of implementing change, other executive fire officers could use this as a case study to learn from and not make the same mistakes.

This project relates to the module on leadership in the Advance Leadership Issues in Emergency Medical Service curriculum. Organizational leaders must develop a vision, communicate the vision and gain commitment for the vision. The first objective was completed. The last two were not completed however.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Change is a process, not an event. It is an interruption of the status quo. When things change within an organization, the organization will resist. Many organizations will go through changes. Most people find it hard to change. We possess a fear of the unknown and a tendency to defend our territory (Williams, 1991). People are creatures of habit and tend to like things the same. But within any organization, change can occur in leadership, organizational culture, procedures, policies and new technology. In addition, new faces, employees, coworkers and physical surroundings can change. Anytime a change involves altering people's habits, they will resist (Williams, 1991).

Most individuals like to experience new things as long as it does not threaten their sense of survival (Keil, 1994). Survival for anyone in an organization is of paramount importance. People need to feel secure in the environment in which they work. Many see it as something to fear or they simply don't understand it (Frost, 1993).

When change is introduced, the organization will react in certain ways. The first may be the shock of disbelief. The second is an unsure or uneasy feeling about management and what

they are doing. The third, people want to be part of process, and if left out, they will resist

(D'Aprix 1996).

The biggest threat to change is to ignore those that will be impacted by the change.

People want and need to feel in control of the events around them (Kanter, 1991). People also

need to see a benefit to the change (Greiner, 1986). Even though some may resist, many see

change as a positive or a challenge (Frost, 1993).

Change can only make an organization better by expanding the organization and the

services it provides. Change: you start by getting people to buy-in to a vision on what the

change will look like in the future (D'Aprix, 1996).

Changing conditions demand more strategic management and less traditional planning

(Williams, 1991). Managers and leaders need to be better at managing the event and emotions

of the change then the event itself. Change should not bewilder us; it should challenge us

(Martel, 1986). Being innovative will help create that change.

Once a change is needed, the organization can prepare. Organizations must prepare the

employee for change (Keil, 1994). Many organizations use educational programs to promote

strategic changes and to prepare the employee(Martel, 1986). Managers and senior managers

need to understand what they do and don't know. Clearing up this information is critical to the

preparation (Duck, 1993). Failing to overcome bad information or misinformation will destine

the change to failure (Bruegman, 1994). Preparing not only the employee, but also the manager

will greatly enhance the chance of success.

Another critical factor in preparing an organization to change is feedback (Duck, 1993).

Create a dialogue with them, guide them and provide them with feedback about the change and

how they are accepting the change (Duck, 1993). Even though the organization is preparing, senior managers need to prepare. Change requires transformational skills to include visioning, mobilizing employees and guiding them to success (Fombrun, 1992). Skill development in these areas are critical to the success of the change. But probably the most critical element is involving the employee directly.

When preparing for change, have those that are most impacted by the change help develop the change (Duck, 1993). No one likes to be told what to do. Start by getting people to buy into the new vision (Duck, 1993). Tell them what is expected of them and set priorities and deadlines (D'Aprix, 1996). Managers and leaders need to involve the employee in planning, decision-making and implementing changes. In addition, make the employees' values coincide with the organization's (D'Aprix, 1996). Senior management must also be involved to support those to change by providing feedback and guidance (Chang, 1994).

Other key elements have been identified as being important to the change process. Employee involvement, participative management and empowering employees to make decisions (Williams, 1991). One effective way to gain employee involvement is through employee groups. Coalitions that are made up of the employees are clearly necessary in change implementation (Kotter, 1995).

Sponsoring change is another critical factor. Sponsoring are those individuals that will help in the process or sustain the change (Heiss, 1993). However, managers are not necessarily good sponsors. Employees that are effected by the change can be excellent sponsors of the change (Heiss, 1993).

Communication is an essential tool for accomplishing change (D'Aprix, 1996).

Typically, organizations underestimate the level of communication that must occur during the

planning and implementation cycle (Hall, 1993). Communication is a tool that is often used

poorly and thoughtlessly (D'Aprix, 1996). Communication needs to be proactive and two-way

(D'Aprix, 1996). Managers must walk the talk and not give lip service. They say

empowerment but shoot down every new idea that comes from the employees (Duck, 1993).

Leaders are open communicators who provide information as well as listen to the input of others

(Duck, 1993). We must recognize our employees for their input and ideas and use them to

facilitate change (Williams, 1991). When managers or leaders are communicating with

employees, they must supply good information (Bruegman, 1994). Bad information or

misinformation can cause a change to fail (Duck, 1993).

Critical elements to consider during a change include employee input and strategic plans

for implementation. Managers must include employees at all levels in the change efforts (Keil,

1994). Managers and leaders must allow lower groups of employees to solve problems that

they have first hand knowledge of (Greiner, 1986). In general, allow employees to control

where they want to be (McDermott, 1992). Successful change implementation is possible

through active problem solving across organizational lines and with multidisciplinary groups

(Williams, 1991). Ultimately, change failure or success rests with the employee (Duck, 1993).

Without considering the employee, time is wasted. Our employees hold the key to success

(Williams, 1991).

Managers and leaders need to inspire employees. Inspiring employees to initiate change

and to become change agents is vital (Williams, 1991). Innovation and input are keys to

implementing change (Williams, 1991). Failing to produce change is because leaders and managers have not allowed the employees to be part of the process (Kotter, 1995). How we deal with change will set our organization culture for today and tomorrow (Williams, 1991).

Change strategy is needed to help facilitate change and manage change. Some change strategies have been to tell the organization to trust management. However, cynical people tend to derail this approach if problems have occurred in the past in regards to trust (Duck, 1993). Other strategies contend that understanding how pieces balance off one another and how changing one element change the rest. Sequencing and pace also affect the whole structure (Duck, 1993). Using a team approach to strategic planning is fundamental and effective (Coggan, 1993). This allows input from all levels and gets the employee to buy-in.

PROCEDURES

Research Methodology

The desired outcome of this research project was to identify factors that attributed to the problems with the non-emergency transfer service and its acceptance by the employees. The research was descriptive in that a literature review was conducted to explore how to plan and implement change in an organization. The information that was gathered was based on industry experts from the business sector. Expert information from the fire service was also used.

The research was action research in that a survey was used to gather important information from those that have been affected by the non-emergency transfer service. The survey was sent out to 80 members of the organization. Sixty-six surveys were returned. This

level of feedback provided excellent insight into the factors which attributed to the problems with the non-emergency transfer service.

Using common areas identified from the literature review, a survey was developed. In addition, a post change assessment instrument was also referenced for survey development (Dobies, 1995). The purpose of the survey was to focus on planning and implementation functions / elements of change.

The information will be used to develop a change management instrument to be used by management to successfully implement change in the future.

Limitations

The information gathered may not reflect the factors that have attributed to the problems of the non-emergency transfer service. Most elements assessed were about management's performance. When the survey was given out, it was expressed that there would be no repercussions from answering the survey. Truthful answers were wanted and necessary. The level of confidence in the survey may not truly reflect the total organization. Sampling for the organization would have required that seventy (70) surveys be returned to assure 95% confidence level in the survey.

RESULTS

There were 85 surveys distributed and 66 were returned for inclusion in the results section of this paper.

1. What part of the planning phase failed when initiating this change?

Based upon the survey results as shown in Appendix B the following elements were identified as being critical points that failed during the change process. The planning process for

this survey was identified as the time between the start of the planning process and

implementation. This included planning, communications and commitment. Employees

identified that it was unknown how to make corrective adjustments to problems and then how

the change would be communicated. In addition, management's attempt to explain the change

and the role of the employee was identified as an area that needed improvement. The

employees also identified management did not solicit input and feedback about ongoing

problems. In turn, when feedback was received by management, corrective action was not

taken to make appropriate adjustments or to correct problems.

2. What part of the change management model is the most important?

According to Williams (1991) planning and employee input are essential for

successful change. In 1994, Bruegman wrote that communication was critical for successful

change. And Heiss (1993) identified that sponsorship or commitment was also paramount to

change and its success. Then in 1996, D'Aprix noted effective communication was an essential

tool in accomplishing change. Fombrun (1992) suggested the employee played a vital part in

conceiving and implementing a strategic change.

3. What strategies can be implemented to help facilitate a change in the

   future?

Some change strategies have been to tell the organization to trust you. What happens is

cynical people derail this approach by bringing up the past (Duck, 1993).

Another strategy is outlined in eight basic steps:

1. Diagnose the current situation.

2. Select the highest priority of change.

3. Gain top management commitment and engage employee in planning.

4. Involve other players in the change.

5. Develop an improvement team.

6. Do a trial process.

7. Implement the change.

8. Reevaluate and recycle lessons learned.

Each of these basic steps are essential to managing change (Chang, 1994). Applying a basic

model will enhance the ability of the organization to lead and direct change.

4. What part of the change process is most important to the employee?

Of the 66 respondents to the survey, 42 said that planning was the most important

element within the change process. Contrary to this, 18 employees identified that

communication was just as important as planning. Of the 66 employees, six identified that

commitment to the change was essential to the overall process.

Planning for the change is essential. Both Williams (1991) and Heiss (1993) established

this same element for successful change. Employees want to be part of the process. Leaders

and managers must acknowledge the fact employees want to have some control on what

happens to them.

DISCUSSION

The relationship between the results of the survey and the literature review are similar.

Through the survey, employees suggested management had failed in its attempt at planning,

implementing and sustaining the non-emergency transfer service. The survey also showed

management did not involve employees in the planning and development of the change. Employee involvement is critical for the change to be a success (Williams, 1991).

The survey revealed management was committed to the change. However, the employee commitment level was not as strong. Managers may not be the best sponsors of change; employees tend to fill the role better (Heiss, 1993). Since employees are the ones most likely to be affected by the change, managers need to create an environment that will support the change. The employee will work in the system on a daily basis and must acknowledge the new way of doing things. In contrast, managers seldom experience the daily problems that employees encounter.

Communication was identified as an essential part of the process. Communication needs to be proactive in the change process and not reactive (D'Aprix, 1996). Communicating with the employees is the only way they will know the who, what, when, where, and how of the change. Communicating can be done the "Manage By Walking Around" way (McDermott, 1992). Visit with employees in non-threatening ways and build a rapport with them. Learning to listen is just as important as speaking.

Planning, commitment and communication need to be given serious consideration when developing and implementing change. Organizations will be able to benefit from such efforts. Organizations will see improved relationships between labor and management. An organizational culture will be created which embraces change and expects change.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The discussion and literature review sections of this paper support several areas that need to be considered when planning, implementing and evaluating change. The first is

employee involvement in planning. Employees hold the key since they are the gatekeepers to the success of change. They want to be involved in what happens to the organization and to them. Failing to involve employees in the process will destine any change for failure.

Employee commitment to change has to be established as well. Employees need to see what is in it for them. They need to see the benefit in changing from the status quo. Even when faced with possible downsizing, the fact employees see it may not be enough to encourage change. Urgency to change must be included in the process. The "not if, but when" mentality needs to be engrained into the employee.

Communication has been used as a reason for change failure. In this case, it is true. Communication strategies need to be developed. The basis behind communication is to provide essential information to employees. Letting them know the who, what, when, where, why and how is vital. Communication is an ongoing process during the change. Daily, weekly and monthly updates need to be delivered to keep employees informed.

Including employees in the planning and implementation phases of change will increase the probability of successful change. Using a planning document that incorporates the information found in Appendix A will enable the organization to better plan, implement and evaluate change in the future.

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Appendix A
Organizational Change Assessment Survey

**Executive Fire Officer Program
Applied Research Project**

I am gathering information about the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the non-emergency transfer service that our organization recently started. Please take a few minutes and rate each aspect of the change process on the scale of 1 (not true) to 4 (very true). This information will be used for research purposes.

I.   **Planning**

Prior to implementation of the change, I knew…

_____   1. The scope of the change to include all operational issues.

_____   2. Who would be affected.

_____   3. The desired results.

_____   4. How people would respond to this change.

_____   5. The impact of this change on the employees.

_____   6. The results of staying with the status quo. Providing the same services.

_____   7. The economic influences on this change.

_____   8. The political influences on this change.

_____   9. The regulatory influences on this change.

_____   10. The time needed to implement this change.

_____   11. The staffing needed for this change and how it would be handled.

_____   12. The money needed for this change.

_____   13. Other resources needed. (equipment, etc.)

_____   14. Who the decision makers were.

_____ 15. How monitoring was going to take place.

_____ 16. How to make corrective adjustments to problems.

_____ 17. How the change would be communicated prior to the change. The what, by whom, and to whom.

_____ 18. How to communicate during the change transition, what to communicate and to whom.

II. **Commitment**

Prior to the implementation of the change…

_____ 19. Management was committed to the change. (buy-in)

_____ 20. Employees were committed to the change. (buy-in)

_____ 21. The organization had continued support for this change.

_____ 22. There was a commitment by those that controlled the resources. (City)

III. **Communications**

Prior to the implementation of the change…

_____ 23. Management involved the employees in the implementation planning.

_____ 24. Management explained the change, the who, what, when, where, why, how and the role of the employee.

_____ 25. Management explained the change to the recipients of the new service.

_____ 26. Management solicited input and feedback ongoing about potential problems.

_____ 27. Management encouraged all to ask questions.

_____ 28. Management planned how to keep all informed.

_____ 29. Management accepted feedback about the change and made adjustments accordingly.

Of the following elements, please select the one (1) element that you feel is most important to the change process.

_____ Planning   _____ Communication_____ Employee Buy-in

_____ Commitment   _____ Management Buy-in

Appendix B

Table B1

Planning Elements of Change

Element		Mean Rating
1. The scope of the change to include all operational issues.		1.36
2. Who would be affected.		2.72
3. The desired results.	2.54	
4. How people would respond to this change.	2.45	
5. The impact of this change on the employees.	1.45	
6. The results of staying with the status quo. Providing the same services.	1.90	
7. The economic influences on this change.		1.63
8. The political influences on this change.		1.63
9. The regulatory influences on this change.		1.45
10. The time needed to implement this change.	1.45	
11. The staffing needed for this change and how it would be handled.		1.45
12. The money needed for this change.	1.54	
13. Other resources needed. (equipment, etc.)		2.00
14. Who the decision makers were.		1.54
15. How monitoring was going to take place.	1.00	
16. How to make corrective adjustments to problems.	1.36	

17. How the change would be communicated prior to   1.18
      the change. The what, by whom, and to whom.

Table B1 continued

Planning Elements of Change

Element	Mean Rating
18. How to communicate during the change transition, what to communicate and to whom.	1.27

Table B2

Commitment Elements of Change

Element	Mean Rating
19. Management was committed to the change.	3.36
20. Employees were committed to the change.	1.90
21. The organization had continued support for this change.	1.72
22. There was a commitment by those that controlled the resources. (City)	2.63

Table B3

Communication Elements of Change

Element	Mean Rating
23. Management involved the employees in the implementation planning.	1.36
24. Management explained the change: the who, what, when, where, why, how and the role of the employee.	1.18
25. Management explained the change to the recipients of the new service.	2.00

26. Management solicited ongoing input and feedback   1.18
    about potential problems.

27. Management encouraged all to ask questions.   1.72

Table B3 continued

Communication Elements of Change

Element	Mean Rating
28. Management planned how to keep all informed.	1.27
29. Management accepted feedback about the change and made adjustments accordingly.	1.18

Table B4

Employee Identified Important Change Element

Element	Mean Rating
Planning	42
Communication	18
Commitment	6
Employee Buy-in	0
Management Buy-in	0