DEVELOPMENT OF A PROMOTIONAL POLICY FOR THE POSITION OF BATTALION CHIEF

Executive Leadership

Axes to Bugles: Development of a Promotional Policy for the Position of Battalion Chief.

Jason R. Loftus
Accomack County Department of Public Safety
Tasley, Va.

December 2007
Appendices Not Included. Please visit the Learning Resource Center on the Web at http://www.lrc.dhs.gov/ to learn how to obtain this report in its entirety through Interlibrary Loan.
Certification Statement

I hereby certify that this paper constitutes my own product, that where the language of others is set forth, quotation marks so indicate, and the appropriate credit is given where I have used the language, ideas, expression, or writings of another.

Signed: ______________________________
Abstract

The problem is that without a formal promotional process for the position of Battalion Chief in place the Department of Public Safety opening its self to potentially liability, in the form of legal action, grievances and decreased morale. The purpose of the research is to examine existing promotional practices within the fire service and identify components of those practices useful in for the development of a plan for Accomack County. Action research was used to answer research questions designed to find legal limitations, current fire service promotional practices, and the compilation of data to create a plan for ACDPS. Data was collected through personal interviews and questionnaires as well as literary review. Results indicated several common evaluative assessment tools being used.
Table of Contents

Certification Statement ................................................................. 2
Abstract ........................................................................ 3
Table of Contents ................................................................. 4
Listing of Tables .................................................................. 5
Introduction ........................................................................ 6
Background and Significance .................................................... 8
Literature Review ................................................................. 10
Procedures ........................................................................ 16
Results .............................................................................. 20
Discussion ........................................................................... 29
Recommendations ............................................................... 32
References ........................................................................... 36
Appendix A: Fire Department Questionnaires ......................... 38
Appendix B: Promotional Policy for Battalion Chief ................. 48
Listing of Tables

Table 1 ........................................................................................................................................20
Comparison of response to Krejcie & Morgan’s (1970) recommended sample size

Table 2........................................................................................................................................23
Assessment center exercises used by questionnaire respondents.

Table 3........................................................................................................................................24
Related dimensional elements used to evaluate respondents for position of Battalion Chief
Introduction

In 1679, the first fire department was established in America. It’s single mission was to extinguish and/or prevent the spread of fire. Officers in those first fire departments were usually selected by the department’s membership and selections were often based upon personality, friendships or simply who the membership was willing to follow (Paulsgrove, 1997).

Over the years the fire service has become a true public service. Fire departments now handle vehicle accidents, high angle rescue, trench rescue, calls for medical assistance and transport, water rescue, education, inspection, investigation and the list becomes more diverse as communities need for help changes. In spite of the improvements that have been instituted within the fire service, the selection of leaders or officers has not kept pace even though their roles are critical to the both the fire service and the community. Many fire departments still elect leaders based upon who they are willing to follow or who is considered to be the best firefighter.

Although today’s career fire service has access to the latest technical and communication advances, intense training and constant skill updating a successful mission still rests with the service officers and their ability to assess and determine the most efficient, effective and safest way to manage a crisis. Selecting qualified officers to lead and motivate a department is critical and perhaps the single most important responsibility a Department Director or Fire Chief has. A clearly delineated process for selection of officers is the only method that will ensure that candidates are evaluated in a fair and unbiased manner and all facets of the fire service requirements are addressed.

In recent years the Department of Public Safety (DPS), has increased its number of career Fire Medics dramatically and now requires the services of a 24 hr shift Battalion Chief Position.
Currently, the DPS for Accomack County does not have a formal promotion policy in place. The problem is without a defined process in place the department will be exposing itself to potential liability in the form of grievances, legal action, decreased staff morale and the possibility of promoting chief officers unable to meet the challenges of today’s fire service.

The purpose of this research is to examine existing promotional policies, identify key elements and content that could then be applied in the development of a promotional policy for the position of Battalion Chief for the Accomack County Department of Public Safety (ACDPS). In compiling this paper the action research method based on the following research questions:

1. What are the local, state and federal requirements for the administration of the promotional processes?
2. What promotional policies and/or practices are currently in use within other fire departments?
3. What specific findings could be applied in the development of a policy for use within the Accomack County Department of Public Safety?
Background and Significance

Accomack County is located on the Delmarva Peninsula. This projection of land begins in the state of Maryland and extends southward ending at the Chesapeake Bridge Bay Tunnel system. Accomack County is one of two Virginia counties bordering the Chesapeake Bay on the west and the Atlantic Ocean on the east. The twenty-five mile Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel system connects the southern end of the peninsula with mainland Virginia. Although Accomack County is only a one hour drive from large cities like Norfolk and Virginia Beach, it remains isolated and largely undeveloped. The area is predominately rural with Fire and EMS services being provided by volunteer Fire and EMS agencies. The County provides supplemental career Fire/Medic staff to ensure coverage for the citizens when volunteer availability is low. The administration of these services is provided by the Department of Public Safety. All career staff is dual-role certified in both Fire and EMS. Currently the Department has thirty five career staff serving at nine stations, providing predominately daytime coverage.

Over the years the County has increased its career staff in order to fill the void created by the lack of available volunteers. Those individuals hired to meet the increasing demand for service have always been at entry or firefighter level. Unfortunately, as the career staff numbers increased, supervision of these new recruits was not addressed. This lack of appropriate supervision has placed a tremendous strain on the Department. Currently, the Department has two Captains; each is assigned to supervise fifteen subordinates in addition to having a permanent station assignment. Due to the need to remain at their assigned stations the Captains are unable observe or meet with their subordinates who are located in the remaining seven stations within the County. In order to effectively increase employee safety, morale, and reduce
liability for the County, additional supervision is needed immediately. In fiscal year 2008, the County’s elected officials agreed to institute and a 24 hr shift Battalion Chief Position. The new position would require three additional people in order to provide 24 hr coverage. This addition to the Department’s staffing would allow for the mobility needed to complete supervisory duties and still have the staff member available to respond on calls. The individuals filling these new positions would have the added responsibility of determining cause and origin of fires throughout the County and would be required to have fire investigator certification.

Since the addition of a 24 hr Battalion Chief position is a new concept for the ACDPS employees it is imperative that the scope and duties assigned to this position be clearly articulated. It is clear that a specific selection process is needed to order to guarantee that only the most skilled and experienced candidates for these new positions be considered. Because the ACDPS operates as a combination model, it is essential that the process be objective, quantifiable and unbiased. With a large number of current staff coming from the volunteer ranks within the County, it will be imperative to avoid any possibility of favoritism or undue influence in the selection process. The formation of the 24 hr Battalion Chief position will take the Department in a new direction. It is readily apparent that the new position would have a significant impact on the future of our Department as well as an impact on the volunteer departments who also serve in the County. For career staff working during the day 6 a.m-6 p.m. the changes would provide additional manpower and a supervisor who has a clear directive and the ability to be where he/she is needed almost immediately. This mobility provides employees with greater access to the organization, an emphasis on fire ground safety and increased training opportunities. For the volunteer departments these positions would provide technical command assistance, positive
command role models, fire investigative services, an additional 24 hr paramedic as needed, and the occasion to build relationships and increase communication with the volunteer departments.

The position articulated above requires individuals with well developed technical and inter-personal skills as well as positive leadership ability. Given the myriad of promotional processes and exams available to today for executive officer positions, additional definitive research is needed in order to find those processes most beneficial to the Accomack Department of Public Safety. In addition, the selected processes will provide a basis for future promotions.

As presented in the Executive Leadership course, it is the responsibility of the Executive Fire Officer or in this case the Director of Public Safety, to ensure employees understand the selection process, as it can enhance the utilization of personnel resources and provide best fits for the selected candidate and the organization as a whole (National Fire Academy, 2005).

Action research will be used to answer a series of survey questions designed to identify current polices for assessment of Battalion Chief candidates currently being used in career departments and determine the essential elements of these successful plans. This data will be used in the development of a policy for assessment and selection of Battalion Chief for ACDPS. The promotion of the most qualified fire service leaders supports the United States Fire Administration (2007) operational objective of, “Reducing the loss of life from fire-related hazards” (p.1) within the target groups of firefighters.

Literature Review

The research information presented in this paper focuses on the development of a promotional process for the position of Battalion Chief. Much of the literature review revealed
only the general aspects of the promotional process and was not position title specific. A search of the National Fire Academy’s Learning Resource Center, located in Emmitsburg, Maryland, as well as trade manuals and the world-wide web were used as the basis for this review. The purpose of the literature review was to develop a foundation for the applied research process contained within.

The goal was to determine what promotional systems were currently in place and the effectiveness of these evaluative measures. The search attempted to focus on polices and procedures that addressed promotion beyond that of the company officer or entry level Chief position. Specific information was sought in regard to elements and processes that could be effectively applied to the development of a promotional policy for ACDPS.

In examining some of the legal considerations for promotion it is important to note that the Commonwealth of Virginia is a right to work state. In effect, this means that persons who are employed by public entities need not be represented nor be a member of a union. In addition, localities are not held to conduct binding arbitration with unions (Commonwealth of Virginia, 2004). The legal implications of this determination must be taken into consideration in the development of any new promotional policy. The significance of this finding eliminates negotiations with the unions as to the terms and conditions of the promotional process.

All promotional, as well as hiring policies, must also take into consideration the Federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) Regulations on discriminatory practice as well as the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which ”Prohibits employment discrimination based upon race, color, religion, sex or national origin” (Brightline Compliance, n.d., p.1). In order to comply with these guidelines it is recommended by the EEOC that any oral interviewers have some level of training with regard to discrimination in order prevent potential lawsuits. The
emphasis is to hire based solely on the candidate’s qualifications and not discriminating factors (Brightline Compliance, n.d.).

It can be said that with any new promotional process one can anticipate that there will be some kind of a reaction from members of the organization. This is especially true of Accomack Dept. of Public Safety. Ninety eight percent of the current career staff came from the volunteer ranks of Accomack County. The practice of the County’s volunteer departments addressing promotion to any position even that of chief officers is done by majority vote. This concept of electing the most popular person for a position or the most well liked is still prevalent in the organization today. Being a small Department, it is not often that these promotions take place and once the person is promoted the individual usually remains in that position until retirement. Fighting past practice methods is difficult but without change growth cannot take place. Promotions are a long term investment in the Department and the community. The right leaders selected today will help to ensure the health and safety all of concerned and take the Department to new levels of competence and service in the future. Providing a set of guidelines defining the process is the first critical step in moving the Department forward.

According to Johnson (1995); “Promotion within a fire department is one of the most important functions the fire chief must administer” (p.250). Promotions, if done correctly can increase department morale, and move the department forward or if done poorly can have a negative impact on organizational morale. (Johnson, 1995)

Not having a process can compromise the entire organization. Hawley (2003) reported that not having a procedure in place for a promotional process to the position of Driver/Operator had ramifications throughout the fire department of Allen, Texas. This resulted in lost of confidence in the administration, qualified people did not apply and grievances were filed by all
of the finalists. The failure of the organization to have a policy and several last minute changes, led to the perception that the administration manipulated the process to the benefit of those they wished to select.

The need for a promotional process or policy is clear. But it begs the question, where does a department begin in order to develop the most appropriate process for their individual needs? The elements of the process must be job related, valid and fair (Edwards, 2000).

Accomack County began the process by engaging an outside consulting firm, Springstead Inc. of Saint Paul, MN., an independent consultation firm to develop a job description for the position of Battalion Chief. The result was a job description broken into key elements or dimensions. Michelson & Maher, (2001) discussed the use of key, measurable, observable knowledge skills and abilities (KSA) as job dimensions. For the position of Battalion Chief for the ACDPS the dimensions incorporated; included varying degrees of KSA in the following areas; data utilization, human interaction, equipment use, verbal aptitude, mathematical aptitude, functional reasoning, situational reasoning, physical ability, dexterity, sensory requirements, knowledge of work, quality of work, quantity of work, dependability, attendance, initiative, enthusiasm, judgment, cooperation, relationships with other, coordination of work, safety, planning, organizing, staffing, leading, controlling, delegating, decision making, creativity, human relations, policy implementation, policy formulation (ACDPS, 2006).

Included with the dimensional elements of the job description, the minimum prerequisite educational and certification requirements were also presented. According to Curmode, Brazell & Leslie (2007) having these prerequisites identified assist aspiring officers to be aware of the fundamentals needed in order to be eligible to move to the next level, long before a process is announced.
In order to effectively present and evaluate the most important dimensions, a system of assessment strategies need to be designed in order to elicit behaviors in as many of the dimensions mentioned as possible. The more dimensions addressed the more data the evaluators will have in order to make the best possible determination (Michelson & Maher, 2001).

The most common evaluation process being used in the fire service today is the written exam (Mahoney, 1988). Most departments provide a reading list that covers areas that questions for the exam will be derived from (Kastros, 2006). Generally, the exam is structured using a multiple choice format and only targets general not specific knowledge of the work dimension. Murtagh (1994) believes there is little coordination between this type of testing and situations an officer would face in the real life.

A second assessment method used is the oral interview. During this process a number of job related questions are asked of the candidates covering job knowledge, department standard operating procedure (SOP) while observing presentation and demeanor. According to Mahoney (1988), the two most important elements of oral interviews were the dimensions of job knowledge and decision making. The National Fire Protection Association (1997) makes mention that the oral interview is an important aspect of candidate’s assessment however, it warns that interviewer bias may be subject to challenge. Therefore, care and effort should be taken when designing oral interview questions and interviewer training should be provided prior to the process as indicated by (Brightline(n.d.). Oral interviews normally consist of a panel of evaluators, which can be personnel within the department, from other fire departments or personnel from allied professions (Kastros, 2006).

Another common method of promotional testing is the Assessment Center. Assessment Centers are defined as a process and not an exam, for determining suitability for promotion both
in the public and private sector environments (Hale, 2004). Using a combination of methods including situational exercises, representing relevant job functions are incorporated into the interview process in order to reach a determination regarding the candidate’s potential and/or areas of deficiency (Thornton, 1992). Assessment Centers, unlike written exams or oral interviews, provide insight into actual abilities under working conditions rather than just academic knowledge. This assessment technique is a better predictor of actual job performance than answers given on a written exam (Michelson & Maher, 2001). Multiple dimensions can be accurately tested using the assessment center process and replicating actual job requirements (Kirtley, n.d.).

The literature offered an endless array of assessment center exercises or situations to choose from. The most frequently mentioned were; the in-basket exercise, tactical problem, employee counseling session, citizen interview, fire inspection exercise, training/presentation exercise, accident review, the leaderless group, and a fact finding exercise.

The literature review has identified several promotional assessment tools available to today’s Fire Chief. The assessment center appears to have the most flexibility and depth in covering the dimensional elements derived from the job description (Lowry, 1995). Oral and written exams are also valid evaluative measures since they provide insight into a candidate’s knowledge base.

A final assessment element mentioned in the literature was that of the Chief’s review. Several authors listed the chief’s review as a commonly used component of the promotional process (Comstock, 2005 & Kastros, 2006 & Terpak, 2006). The literature was not consistent and failed to identify the dimension or element that was used most often in the evaluative process it did however, support the subjective practice of selection at a Chief’s discretion and other
assessments such performance evaluations, physical fitness scores, staff input, time in grade and additional training above what is actually required, may or may not be considered in the selection of a candidate.

Procedures

The personal interview and questionnaire methods were used to collect information for this applied research project.

The first method used to begin the collection of information was the one on one interview with Accomack County administrative personnel. The question presented to them is as follows: What are the local, state and federal requirements for the administration of the promotional processes?

The first interview was conducted on October 19, 2007, with Mr. Mark Taylor, Staff Attorney for Accomack County. Mr. Taylor was selected for his legal expertise in the area of hiring practices and personnel law. A series of 6 questions were developed in advance of the interview to provide focus and guidance during the interview. The complete list of questions can be found in appendix B of this document.

A second interview was conducted on the same date with Mrs. Linda Martin-Warner, Human Resources Director for Accomack County. Mrs. Martin-Warner was chosen in an effort to provide a second perspective to question one and to explore her expert knowledge of hiring practices, ADA compliance, and County personnel policy. A complete list of questions used can be found in appendix B of this document.
In addition to the one on one interview a questionnaire was developed to obtain information on research questions two and three. Information gained from the literature helped to serve as a basis for the questions developed on the questionnaire.

Questions one, two and three on the questionnaire collected basic departmental information, presence of a promotional policy and provided an opportunity to describe the department’s current promotional practice.

Question four, included a list of testing methods for respondents to choose from. These potential testing methods were developed from the information provided from the literature.

Question five included a list of potential assessment center exercises in an effort to find the most commonly used situational exercises.

Question six, addressed all of the behavioral dimensions contained in Accomack County’s job description/job analysis for the position of Battalion Chief. Since this job description was developed by an outside vendor it was assumed that these dimensions were vetted against other localities with the position of Battalion Chief.

The remaining questions were designed to determine what other practices departments were using within their individual promotional processes. A complete listing of questions can be found in appendix A.

The questionnaire format included yes/no responses, multiple choice and open ended questions designed to gain understanding with regard to the processes used in other departments. All questions included a choice of, other, with directions to explain in detail if their responses did not define accurately the process they were using.

In order to maximize respondent participation an electronic web based system was used. Survey Monkey, a web-based organization, hosted the electronic internet based questionnaire.
An e-mail cover letter and an explanation of the research, as well as a direct link to Survey Monkey, were sent to each subject. The questionnaire was designed to take no longer than five minutes to complete. It consisted of short answer, multiple choice and short essay questions. At the conclusion of the survey subjects were asked to submit copies of their promotional process, policies or guidelines to an e-mail address that was included.

In addition an e-mail containing the cover letter and web link entitled EFO-Research was distributed to a select group of Executive Fire Officers from the National Fire Academy on October 21, 2007. Responses to the questionnaire were considered closed on November 2, 2007. The target groups represented the following Executive Officer classes at the National Fire Academy; December 2004, Executive Development, January 2005, Leading Community Risk Reduction, January 2007, Executive Analysis of Fire Service Operations in Emergency Management, October 2007, Executive Leadership.

This target group was selected because they represented predominantly career departments which would mostly likely have a similar position as well as some type of process in place. The selected group represented a cross section of Fire Service throughout the United States. A total of 64 questionnaires were sent out and 29 completed questionnaires were returned.

Definitions

Battalion Chief – Shall mean a mid-level management position within the Fire and EMS service responsible for the supervision of more than 2 company officers.

Company Officer – A first level supervisor, responsible for the supervision of 3-5 personnel assigned to Fire or EMS apparatus.
Assessment Center – A set of exercises designed to demonstrate a desired performance behavior tailored toward performance dimensions of a job description.

Time in Grade – The amount of time or years an employee has spent in a specific position or at a specified rank within the organization.

Promotional Process /Policy – A written outline of the method/methods to be followed in order to determine and maintain validity during the promotional process.

Behavior Dimensions – Those behavioral traits or elements determined to be prerequisites to successfully completing the required functions in a given job role.

Limitations and Assumptions

A large percentage of the respondents 42% were not able to provide specific information with regard to the promotional process used by their departments. Either a process did not exist or their department did not have a person functioning in the role identified. An additional limitation was that not all departments had the title of Battalion Chief within their ranks. This limitation was identified early in the research and an attempt was made on the questionnaire to define the role this position played. Respondents were asked to consider any subsequent title or position within their department with similar functions or responsibilities and to respond accordingly for data collection purposes.
According to research conducted by Krejcie and Morgran, (1970), in order to have a viable representative sample, to support a valid conclusion, the number of returned responses should have been significantly higher [63%] more than those received.

Table 1

*Comparison of Responses to Krejcie & Morgan’s (1970) Recommended Sample Size*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Group</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Response Received</th>
<th>Suggested Sample Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Executive Fire Officers surveyed</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results

Question 1. What are the local, state and federal requirements for the administration of the promotional processes?

According Mr. Mark Taylor, Accomack County Attorney, any promotional policy must be fair to all who submit to the process. Care should be taken to develop a process that eliminates bias based on age, race, sex and other elements as listed in both the county policy and the County’s Antidiscrimination Policy. One of the greatest concerns Mr. Taylor expressed was preventing the possibility of grievance to the process. His recommendation to address this concern was to insist that the policy be written with clear standards and benchmarks that are easily identified and measurable through each of the phase of any promotional activity and these conditions be communicated to all within the Department. In order to eliminate any possibility of interdepartmental personnel issues or the opportunity for favoritism, he recommended the use
of outside fire service professionals as evaluators. Because Virginia is a right to work state he recommended that any promotional policy remind candidates that upon promotion, a new probationary period would begin and the right to work can be revoked at anytime during that period. In addition, the policy should state at the very beginning that all information obtained is part of the evaluative process and therefore becomes part of the employee’s personnel file and is not subject to freedom of information requests. Each individual candidate is allowed to review only their personnel file and no one else’s. A final recommendation was to ensure that the policy addressed both verbal and written language. Given the nature of the position, as well as the fact that the official language of the Commonwealth of Virginia is English, it can be required of any candidate applying for any position mentioned be able to speak, understand and read English, without accommodation. It is imperative that the candidates have command of English, both oral and written in order to ensure that orders that are given are fully understood the first time. Any misunderstanding or the need to repeat an order may jeopardize the safety of others. The same would hold true for all written communications especially when required to read medications and protocols dealing with life safety. Therefore, no accommodation will be made for those who cannot fully use and understand the English language. The recommendation must be clearly articulated in the policy.

Mrs. Linda Martin-Warner, Human Resources Director for Accomack County, was also interviewed to determine if there were any current statutes or policy regulations that had to be taken into consideration when answering the proposed research questions.

Mrs. Warner’s comments echoed those of Mr. Taylor in regard to ensuring the process did not discriminate based upon race, age or gender. She emphasized several times the need for fairness to all who apply. Mrs. Warner mentioned; “Do the right thing legally,” but also morally
and ethically as well. Mrs. Warner stated that in her opinion, the policy must be applied uniformly and not used as a means of retaliation by the administration or it would then be the basis for a grievance. She reaffirmed that a candidate’s scores become part of the candidate’s personnel file not subject to the Freedom of Information Act. She also felt that the County Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Policy should be referenced in any promotional policy that is developed and must include a statement confirming that the “most suitable employee” would be promoted into the position. She also expressed her contention and concern that we keep in mind that the most qualified candidate may not be the best individual for the position especially if personality issues could affect employee performance.

Question 2. What are the promotional policies/practices that are being used by other fire departments?

A number of executive fire officers from around the country responded to the questionnaire designed to answer this question. Of the sixty four questionnaires sent out, none were returned due to inaccurate e-mail address. A total of thirty were completed and returned.

Fifty nine percent of the respondents indicated that they either had a written standard operating procedure (SOP) in place or had a defined process for the hiring of Battalion Chiefs. Of those with a process or policy in place the responses were extremely close with regard to the type of evaluation system being used. 62% of the respondents reported that the Chief’s Interview was the most common method of evaluation while 58% listed the written exam and Assessment Center, 54% listed the oral panel interview as their method of evaluation.
When questioned about the different exercises contained in the assessment center element of the evaluation, the answers varied greatly. Respondent results are depicted in Table 2.

Table 2.

*Assessment center exercises used by the respondents to the questionnaire*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment Center Element</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Written Exam</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panel Interview</td>
<td>52.6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written Essay</td>
<td>47.4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-Basket</td>
<td>42.1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaderless Group</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire Tactical Simulation</td>
<td>63.2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMS Tactical Simulation</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Employee</td>
<td>68.4</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Citizen</td>
<td>42.1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company Meeting Exercise</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company Training Exercise</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Interview</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Development</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Presentation</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accident investigation</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code Enforcement Issue</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The highest number of respondents indicated that the problem employee exercise was most often used in the assessment center phase of evaluation. The fire tactical simulation was listed as the second most frequently used evaluative tool. Using 25% of the respondent scores as a threshold; applicability, public presentation, written exam, panel interview, written essay, in-basket and public presentation ranked above the threshold.

The literature indicated that assessment centers as well as the evaluation process should be based upon the dimensional elements of the job. Table 3, lists respondent scores based upon the identified elements.

Table 3.

*Dimensional elements for the position of Battalion Chief evaluated by respondents*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensional Element</th>
<th>Percent Score</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of Work</td>
<td>72.7</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judgment</td>
<td>68.2</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading</td>
<td>72.7</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlling</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>63.6</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizing</td>
<td>68.2</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffing</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relation with Others</td>
<td>54.6</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordination of Work</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delegating</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision Making</td>
<td>77.3</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Creativity  18.2  4
Policy Implantation  36.4  8
Policy Formulation  13.6  3
Physical Ability  13.6  3
Situational Reasoning  68.2  15
Functional Reasoning  50.0  11
Verbal Aptitude  40.9  9
Mathematical Aptitude  0.0  0
Data Utilization  4.6  1

Data from the questionnaire responses demonstrated that decision making was the most sought after element especially in the assessment center phase. The decision making element was followed closely by knowledge of work, judgment, organizational skills, and situational reasoning.

In addition to the elements listed in the questionnaire, some respondents added English composition, sensitivity, reading retention, and education, as valuable elements. Each of the additional elements received one respondent score.

An area of interest was who actually completed the evaluations. Respondents indicated overwhelmingly that fire service professionals from outside their departments were used. 21 of the 30 respondents answered this question, with 19 of the respondents indicating the use of personnel from outside their respective departments as evaluators. Only 2 respondents indicated that personnel from within the fire department were being used as evaluators in the process.
With regard to how each of the evaluative elements are complied into a final score or ranking, fifteen respondents indicated that the score from each area received some degree of weighted scoring applied to the final score. Five respondents indicated by weighted score and no other detail on how the score would be compiled in a final score or rank.

One of the questions on the questionnaire that produced interesting data was: Do you post scores within your department? 60.9% or 14 respondents indicated scores were not posted, however, rankings were posted. Nine respondents indicated that actual scores were listed or posted.

Other factors that were being considered as a part of the promotional process were also identified. Of the options listed, 16 respondents identified, education, as important to their department, 13 respondents listed time in grade and 14 respondents included performance evaluations. Additional elements that were included by the respondents included resume and popularity. Only 3 respondents indicated that they were aware of other factors that were taken into consideration but failed to identify those factors.

The question; Do you feel your promotional process has been effective in distinguishing good leaders from the candidate pool, was an attempt to ascertain whether respondents felt their department’s promotional process was effective and if they supported it. 17 of the 23 who answered this question indicated that they felt that their process did achieve the goal of isolating exceptional leaders. 6 respondents indicated that their current process was ineffective in isolating leadership qualities.

Although the number of responses to the questionnaire produced a small sampling the information that was generated provided the basis and direction for the research questions.
The purpose of this research was to gather and select information that would assist in the development of a comprehensive promotion process that would not only assist the ACDPS with the new Battalion Chief position but with other officer positions as well. It is this researcher’s belief that a truly comprehensive promotion policy will support the selection of qualified leaders and will be the stimulus for continued promotion throughout an officer’s career.

Research question 3; What specific findings can be applied in the development of a policy for use by the Accomack County Department of Public Safety? attempted to isolate those dimensions that would foster a continuous and successful promotion process.

The examination of the data collected from questions one and two produced valuable information by identifying key elements that could then be applied in the development of a promotional policy for the Department of Public Safety.

A Standard Operating Policy for Promotion to Battalion Chief was developed using this information and additional data gained from the research. The policy developed for Accomack County is divided into six separate sections or elements; purpose, scope, application, process, selection and other.

Elements from research question one and from the personal interviews were incorporated into the Scope Section. An EEO statement and a clearly articulated statement indicating that the scores obtained by applicants are not covered under the Freedom of Information Act and therefore cannot be requested by anyone other than the candidate was added. A final statement was included indicating that; it is the most suitable candidate for the position, not always the most qualified candidate that will be selected for the promotion.
A resume and cover letter was added to the list of requirements after several responding
departments indicating that the information provided in both documents proved to be useful.

As a result of the interview with Mr. Mark Taylor, County Attorney, a statement
addressing mandatory competence levels for English language usage was included.

The evaluation process includes the following elements; a written exam, an assessment
center, fire tactical exercises, oral panel Interview as well as a chief’s interview. Each of the
evaluative components will be tabulated on a weight percentage of 20% for a total score of
100%. Each area will have a total of 100 point that can be awarded.

Once the scores have been tabulated the candidates will be rank ordered and final scores
in each evaluation section will be made available to the individual and not included in the
posting. The candidate who achieves the highest ranking will be selected for the position.

A draft policy was submitted for staff comment on November 10, 2007, as required by
current policy. Staff comments were favorable. The staff felt comfortable knowing that a
predefined formal process was available to them that provided guidelines for preparation. At the
close of the comment period the Policy was put into effect.

The position of Battalion Chief is new to our Department and any feedback that could be
obtained is useful information. In the final section of the Policy under Other, all candidates must
complete an anomalous evaluation of the process. This evaluation must be completed prior to
final posting or requests by the candidates to view their scores. The information provided will be
used to make policy changes in future.
Discussion

The research results revealed that those departments that have promotional policies in place for the position of Battalion Chief are following information that was identified throughout the literature review.

In the research completed by Hawley (2003), having a promotional process in place is essential in maintaining organization stability. 17 of the respondents indicated that they had a process for promotion in place. Those respondents also indicated that the process being used was effective in distinguishing quality leaders from the candidate pool. The inference can be made that those with a written and/or documented process are more likely to have a positive outcomes following the process. During the personal interview conducted with Mark Taylor, he cautioned that if a policy is in place and its contents are known to the members of the organization, it is essential both from a legal and an organizational trust standpoint that the administration follows the policy. If the administration chooses not to follow the policy there is the potential for grievances as well as creating a mistrust of the administration that will remain with the department for years.

Also noted was the frequent use of job related behavioral dimensions. The research completed by Michelson & Mahorer (2001), supports the use of these elements in the evaluative process. The research collected also pointed out that several key dimensional behaviors for the position of Battalion Chief were being assessed more heavily than others. The results supported the statement showing that decision making as the most relied upon element. Making good sound judgmental decisions based upon the evidence at hand is considered the mark of a good leader, according to (NFA, 2006).
The results also substantiated that the areas of situational reasoning, knowledge of work, judgment and organization, were definitely job-related and were used most often in the evaluative process for the position of Battalion Chief. In Accomack County the elements that would prove to be most useful to the Department and the position would be; data utilization, policy formulation, inter-personnel relations clear and the ability to maintain clear and concise communication with subordinates. The size of department may affect the level of KSA in the dimensional elements. ACDPS is a relatively small Department, its Battalion Chiefs would have to manage both a considerable supervisory responsibility both in numbers and distance and maintain an operational role simultaneously. It would be reasonable to assume that large departments, with other levels of management above that of Battalion level would not have the need to require the KSA in the as many elements as in Accomack County.

The NFPA recommended steering away from oral interviews because of the difficultly in quantifying the results. The data collected from the respondents does not support the NFPA recommendation. 25 respondents are using some form of oral interview. These included the Chief’s interview, oral presentation, and/or panel interview. That fact that a number of departments are using this method and have reported it as successful in selecting candidates leads this researcher to believe the process of the oral interview must have some validity. Although, Brightline (n.d.) pointed out care should be taken in designing oral interview questions so that they do not contribute to bias of protected classes and that interviewers should receive training prior to conducting the interviews.

According to Edwards (2000), written exams are often used to screen candidates for promotional positions. In addition Mahoney (1988), indicated that written exams were one of the most popular evaluative tools used in the fire service. Surprisingly the data showed a lower
A total of 14 respondents were using written examinations as part of the promotional process while 25 respondents reported using oral interviews and 17 using assessment centers.

Respondent feedback ranked the use of written exams quite high as the dimensional element to determine job related knowledge. Both oral and written exams are popular methods to obtain evaluative information and as we become more precise in pin-pointing useful information regarding a candidate’s abilities other methods of evaluation will be developed and used.

Assessment Centers were ranked second as the most popular evaluative element by respondents. 17 departments indicated than an assessment center was a part of their promotion process for Battalion Chief. Kirtley (n.d) stated one benefit to assessment centers is their ability to test multiple job dimensions, thus allowing a more accurate evaluation or prediction of behavior.

Some departments have state laws that drive the scope of their promotional process. Garland, TX Fire Department and Mesquite, TX Fire Department, both indicated that their process was governed by Texas Code 143, which describes a Civil Service directive. The Scranton, PA Fire Department, reported that once a process or policy is initiated it is governed by the Civil Service Commission. Research pertaining to the legal requirements in the Commonwealth of Virginia indicated no such state oversight (Commonwealth of Virginia, 2004).

The implication of the data collected was to develop a process for ACDPS for the promotion of persons to the position of Battalion Chief. The process was built upon the most commonly used evaluative tools; a written exam, panel interview, chief’s interview and tactical
fire assessment and assessment center. The benefit gained from this process, should ultimately be the selection of a positive role model for the organization and a competent, educationally, well-rounded leader for the future of ACDPS. A second benefit to the Department addresses morale. Members of the organization realize that each candidate was given a fair and equal opportunity utilizing a well articulated process. In addition, the use of a comprehensive assessment can also be applied as a model for other positions within the ACDPS.

Another benefit to consider is the process makes each candidate aware of his/her strengths and weaknesses. With this type of comprehensive, unbiased information a candidate is aware of the areas or dimensional elements that need improvement and those that are areas of strength. The candidate then has an opportunity to work on those weaknesses through additional education and specific training exercises and be better prepared when the next round of promotions is announced. This type of personal commitment benefits not only the individual but the department as well.

Recommendations

Based upon the research collected a hiring process for Battalion Chief was developed. The next step is the development of the actual evaluative tools that will be used in each section of the evaluation. The following recommendations to achieve the next step are as follows;

- For the written exam, a determination of the specific knowledge base needed for the position. What materials are available to use in the development of the questions and format to be presented?
For the oral interview, developing questions in such a manner that they are as unbiased as possible and yet designed to elicit the candidate’s knowledge of the pertinent dimensional elements that were identified for the position of Battalion Chief.

Assessment Centers - should vary the components presented and not rely on a fixed set of exercises every time the process is opened. Choosing the most appropriate exercises that will elicit the desired behaviors is directly related to the demands of the position, in this case, the position of Battalion Chief. There are several private organizations available to conduct Assessment Centers. However, cost and scheduling flexibility has to be considered.

- The tactical fire exercise - should begin with a sketch using a story board and the man power that is available. Assessment Center exercises require a considerable number of people working behind the scenes with a well designed plan in order to make the process as reliable as possible. Training and practice will be essential for those individuals’ assisting in this component of the promotional process.

- The Director’s interview - must have defined criteria, so each candidate is assured a fair and impartial evaluation. Checklists, questions and other assessment tools will need to be developed.

- Once the details for each section have been defined and documented, it will be important to elicit input on the proposed evaluation materials from others in the Department. This approach should encourage fairness and a sense of entitlement in the process. The use of other Executive Fire Officers outside of Accomack County would be the recommended course of action. Comments and input from those outside officers should be encouraged and the information they provide should taken under advisement and used to further improve the testing materials.
The final phase shall be the actual use of the policy and testing materials in the department’s first promotional process for the position Battalion Chief. This process is tentatively scheduled for July, 2008.

The amount of labor and man hours required to produce the final product will be substantial, but it is worth the investment of time and effort. Accomack Co., remains a small community and promotional opportunities are minimal so it is imperative to complete this project because if it’s impact on the future of the Department and ultimately service to the community. As noted by Johnson (2005) the promotional process is integral to the success of the department, and subsequently one of the most important things a fire chief will do. If done poorly the result will be a negative impact that will have lasting effects and contribute to a decline in morale or a mistrust of the administration as indicated by Hawley (2003).

Additional research should be conducted in the area of design and evaluation of the different Assessment Center exercises. There are still unanswered questions; Are some better than others? How much of an influence does a mock testing scenario have on the final outcome of the Assessment Center exercise? Do candidates who have been selected using the methods outlined above continue to seek higher levels of command?

As with any policy, attention must be paid to the continuous monitoring of the policy’s effectiveness and there must be a method to evaluate this effectiveness. Included in the policy that was developed for ACDPS, all candidates are requested to evaluate the process, this provides the Department with immediate follow-up data and insight into the process as a whole. This data can be used to fine tune individual testing areas and/or the policy in general. Only time and performance evaluations will determine if the policy and its implementation was effective in selecting competent, well-prepared fire service leaders. The majority of the departments with
promotional polices in place indicated that their policy met the goals and expectations for which it was designed. They felt strongly that effective leaders were being selected.
Reference


Accomack County Department of Public Safety (ACDPS). (2006). *Class Description Position Title: Battalion Chief.*


