DEVELOPING AN EDUCATIONAL PLAN

Executive Leadership

Developing an Educational Plan for Aspiring Company and Shift Commanders within the Hartford Fire Department

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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 that appropriate credit is given where I have used the language, ideas, expressions, or writings of another.

Signed: ________________________________
ABSTRACT

The problem was the Hartford Fire Department did not have an educational plan for those aspiring to be company or shift commanders. The purpose of this research was to produce criteria for an educational plan that can be used as a roadmap for those aspiring to become company or shift commanders. Descriptive research was conducted to answer questions regarding NFPA requirements, the expectations of the command staff, requirements of similarly sized departments, and the educational criteria the HFD should consider implementing. A literature review was conducted on career development, and personal interviews were held with the stakeholders. The results indicated adequate educational criteria for these positions exist, and the recommendations were to adopt the qualifications outlined in the national standards.
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INTRODUCTION

In every successful organization there are individuals who make decisions and provide the vision and leadership. Some of these people are appointed formal leaders, while others are simply informal leaders. Many of these leaders have a natural ability and desire to provide the guidance necessary to advance an organization.

In order to be successful leaders in today’s ever changing environment must possess a variety of skills to navigate the numerous dilemmas faced, and find acceptable solutions. No matter the field, whether it is a general in the military making tactical decisions, or the CEO of a technology company looking for the next great product line, leaders must commit to a depth and breadth of knowledge that surpasses the rank and file.

This same commitment to higher education is also required for leaders in the fire service, who must make rapid, critical decisions on a limited amount of information. These decisions can have terrible consequences if the wrong tactic is chosen. This is why officers in today’s fire service must have the education and experience to guide them accordingly.

The research problem is that the Hartford Fire Department (HFD) does not have an educational plan for those aspiring to be company or shift commanders. Failure to have a clear plan creates confusion during the promotional process because members are unaware of the educational expectations of these positions, thus failing to develop the next generation of leaders.

The purpose of this research project is to produce criteria for a comprehensive educational plan that can be used as a roadmap for those aspiring to become company or shift commanders within the Hartford Fire Department.
Descriptive research will be conducted to answer the following questions. (a) What are some of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) requirements for company and shift commanders? (b) What expectations of educational requirements does the command staff of the HFD have for the positions of company and shift commanders? (c) What educational criteria do other departments of similar size use for the positions of company and shift commanders? (d) What are the educational criteria for company and shift commanders that the HFD should consider implementing?

BACKGROUND & SIGNIFICANCE

The HFD, a combination department comprised of twenty-one career and six paid on call members, provides fire, emergency medical, technical rescue, and hazardous materials services to the Town of Hartford, Vermont. The Town of Hartford is a rural community with a population of 10,367 and is located on the State’s eastern most border (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). The HFD operates out of two stations; only the main station is staffed with career firefighters. The total response area covers 39 square miles. The Hartford Career Firefighters Association, Local 2905 of the International Association of Fire Fighters, is the exclusive bargaining agency, which represents 19 of the 21 uniformed positions. These include the positions of company and shift commanders.

The command staff of the HFD is comprised of a Chief, Assistant Chief and four shift commanders, who hold the rank of Captain. Recently the department added the position of Lieutenant to each shift to serve as the company officer. The Department has undergone a restructure of the organization in which the Assistant Chief now heads the prevention division, and the Captains oversee the duties of the operations division. This has been a challenge for all involved to adopt, but progress is being made.
The creation of and competitive testing for the Lieutenant’s positions identified a serious weakness within the ranks of the HFD. Promotional opportunities were very limited in the past, and most firefighters had in excess of 13 years of service at time of testing. It became very clear that an outline of educational requirements for the position had not been developed, so each member felt he/she had the knowledge needed for the position simply based on years of service. After the promotional procedure many members were critical of the process as well as the knowledge, skills, and abilities tested. The areas tested related to the positions; however, many members did not have the skills refined to perform well.

Since both the captains and lieutenants’ positions are represented by the collective bargaining agreement, care must be taken to ensure any changes in minimum requirements are agreed upon by all stakeholders. Moreover, the training and education of the next generation of leaders in the fire service directly relates to two of the United States Fire Administrations operational objectives that are to, “reduce the loss of life from fire of firefighters”, and to “respond appropriately in a timely manner to emerging issues” (National Fire Academy, 2003, p. II-2). Training and educating company and shift commanders will help to ensure correct decisions are made when lives are at stake. This is critical to reducing firefighter fatalities. Further, the lack of appropriate education in future officers is an emerging issue since anticipated retirements in the not so distant future will create the need to fill more vacancies. In addition, preparing personnel for future leadership positions directly relates to the succession/replacement unit of the National Fire Academy’s Executive Leadership course. This unit identifies ways in which to build capabilities, evaluate performance, and produce sufficient personnel to fill vacancies (National Fire Academy, 2005).
LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review for this applied research project (ARP) started during this author’s Executive Leadership course with a visit to the Learning Resource Center (LRC) at the National Fire Academy in Emmitsburg Maryland. The LRC on-line card catalog was used to search for relevant publications addressing career development and succession planning. Internet searches also revealed numerous editorials of interest.

A personal interview was conducted with M.A. Miller (August 28, 2007) Chief of the Hartford Fire Department. Chief Miller was selected since any change to the current minimum qualifications for company and shift commanders would need his support. Chief Miller’s involvement with other fire departments of a larger scale provided valuable insight to a multitude of options.

A personal interview was conducted with R.A. Bushey (August 29, 2007), senior Captain and Training Officer for the Hartford Fire Department. Captain Bushey was selected because of his long tenure with the Hartford Fire Department and because of his involvement in previous attempts to initiate career development standards.

A personal interview was conducted with D.C. Rowlee (August 30, 2007) Secretary/Treasurer of the Hartford Career Firefighters’ Association. Secretary/Treasurer Rowlee was selected because he is the representative of Union. Secretary/Treasurer Rowlee’s support is crucial to any proposed change since his opinions will greatly influence the position of the membership as the company and shift commander positions are part of the collective bargaining agreement.

A personal interview was conducted with G.A. Cutting (August 27, 2007), Chief of Police for the Town of Hartford. Chief Cutting was interviewed to determine the minimum
requirements that the police department utilizes for the positions of Sergeant and Captain. Chief Cutting has an extensive background in law enforcement as well as with multiple agencies.

Multiple national standards have been developed and implemented that outline the professional qualifications for a variety of fire service position. These standards cover a range of positions from entry level firefighter to unique positions such as aircraft firefighting and fire service instructor. NFPA Standard 1021 deals directly with professional qualifications for the fire officer.

According to NFPA 1021 (2003), “this standard shall identify the performance requirements necessary to perform the duties of a fire officer and specifically identifies four levels of progression” (p. 5). Further, the Standard sets forth what has been identified as the minimum job performance requirements of fire service officers. It is understood in the Standard that the fire service operates with varying, progressive levels of responsibility and that departments must choose the appropriate level of authority commensurate with the duties of the position. NFPA 1021 (2003) also outlines the prerequisite knowledge, skills as well as general areas of job performance requirements for the fire officer. Each of these categories is extremely thorough and increases in complexity as the level of fire officer rises.

Preparing the next generation of fire service leaders is a necessity. Broman (2005) offers, that today’s fire service leaders must make it a priority to prepare our next generation of leaders. Failure to prepare them will have major consequences on these future leaders as well as the communities they serve. He also believes that the fire service has a history of promoting people to higher positions before training or educating them. This practice of on the job training is ineffective and goes against most modern management theories. Finally Broman provides that, “professional development is not solely about certifications and degrees. These benchmarks are
useful in documenting achievements in training and education”; however, “the content of the learning experience is of greater importance” (p. 32).

Effective officer development cannot rely exclusively on either education or experience. Shouldris (2005) believes that it is extremely important to merge a combination of experience and education when developing future leaders. This mix combined with an understanding of scene control and administrative/managerial tasks are needed to build effective officers. Shouldris (2005) further states, “although processing a degree does not ensure competency in the officers role, it does give an indication of a person’s commitment to learning” (p. 69).

Bonner (2005) submits that company officers serve as role models, and how company members perceive their officers is that way in which they will conduct themselves. This is extremely important as departments wish to ensure the behavior displayed by the officers is conducive with those desires. Bonner also states that it is the company officers’ responsibility to make their personnel better. A realistic, achievable goal is to build subordinates up to take the place of the officer.

Company and shift commanders have tremendous influence in the fire service. According to Compton (2006), these officers play a vital role in the success on any department. However, the value of these positions is often underestimated by senior management personnel. These officers set the expectations of the shift and must stay proficient and competent to training activities. Additionally, the company officers “willingness to communicate, mentor, coach, and counsel on a regular basis helps maintain consistently high levels of performance” (Compton, 2006, p. 50). This is just one more of the reasons that an effective plan for educating company and shift commanders is necessary (p. 50).
Continual education for company and shift commanders is also critical for continued success. Ludwig (2006) offers that continuing education is very important in career development. Those in the fire service need always to strive to stay informed to the newest trends. Additionally, in successful career development programs it is imperative to locate a mentor for assistance. Mentors provide feedback on good decisions as well as bad ones, and their input can provide the new officer with a valuable foundation on which to base the future.

Compton (2000) also believes that mentoring is a great way for fire service agencies to prepare the next generation of leaders, and that, “educational growth should be encouraged” (p. 36). Compton offers that while fire departments generally do a decent job with regular maintenance on vehicles and cycling through apparatus on replacement schedules, the ball often gets dropped when it comes to personnel. In an effort to combat this, training programs must not only address the needs of the organization today, but must prepare the leaders of tomorrow as well.

In order to ensure the safety of the responders as well as the citizens of the communities, it is important to fill leadership roles with competent, knowledgeable leaders. Cochran (2006) states, “we cannot afford to fill vacancies with untested, unqualified officers who have outdated skills and make poor decisions” (p. 84). Instead, departments should institutionalize succession planning so that members of the organization can chart a course to get them where they desire. If this is done, members have a clear knowledge of the expectations of the positions, and they can take the appropriate course work to prepare themselves.

Evans (2007) provides a very similar and disturbing sentiment as to officer development. Departments are not providing members with the necessary tools to succeed as leaders. While individuals with technical experience often do well in the response mode such as treating
critically injured patients or advancing a hose line, these same individuals do not have the tools acquired to become successful leaders. A lack of knowledge about human dynamics or how to deal with subordinates is not provided, so these very technically able individuals fail miserably when placed as leaders in the organization. This is not acceptable.

Succession planning and career development programs must be consistent with the responsibilities of the positions. According to Smoke (1998), it is imperative that personnel aspiring to become officers are capable of the responsibilities of the position and that career development for these positions should be, “realistic and reasonable” (p. 16). Since much of an officer’s time is spent on non-emergent issues, such as training, inspections, and documentation, there is a critical need to ensure candidates are proficient in these skills. Smoke (1998) further offers that college level instruction in an English composition course is also imperative for the company and/or shift commander. In terms of fire service certification, Smoke (1998) believes that Lieutenants should be certified at the Fire Officer I level and that Captains should be at Fire Officer II. Additionally, he offers that this course work should be completed prior to the promotional test, and although this may result in fewer potential candidates, every candidate will most likely be prepared for the responsibility of the new position.

The National Professional Development Model (Crawford, 2006) outlines the various certifications levels from the entry level Firefighter I to the senior executive at the Fire Officer IV. In this document a Fire Officer I is a supervisor, a Fire Officer II is a manager, a Fire Officer III is an administrator, and a Fire Officer IV is an executive. In terms of education levels equating with the differing officer status, the following is recommended: an Associates degree at the Fire Officer II, a Bachelors at the Fire Officer III, and a Masters degree at the Fire Officer IV. Further Crawford (2006) offers that it is a mix of education and training that takes one through
the various levels. Each level relates to the other, and higher education is a necessary component of the program.

The above mentioned Fire Officer levels are also stated in the Chief Fire Officer’s Desk Reference (Buckman III, 2006). This reference states those at the Fire Officer I are the company officers who ride the apparatus and deliver the services to the community, while the Fire Officer II has authority over the company officers and monitors the effectiveness of the company. Buckman III (2006) states, “Fire Officer I functions primarily as a supervisor with little to no administrative responsibility” while the “Fire Officer II has supervisory and managerial responsibility and a small degree of administrative responsibility” (p. 7).

In summation, the review of published materials and personal interviews on educational requirements, succession planning and career development provides sufficient information surrounding this developing topic. The national standards have been developed, and the International Association of Fire Chiefs is not only supporting this concept, but has created a roadmap for agencies to follow. Many authors provide insight into this topic, and the materials needed to develop minimum qualifications for company and shift commanders are well documented. Through effective use of these materials a well organized plan can be established.

PROCEDURES

Definitions of Terms

Fire Officer I – “The fire officer, at the supervisory level, who has met the job performance requirements specified in this standard for Level I” (NFPA, 2003, p.1021-6).

Fire Officer II – “The fire officer, at the supervisory/managerial level, who has met the job performance requirements specified in this standard for Level II” (NFPA, 2003, p. 1021-6).
Fire Officer III – “The fire officer, at the managerial/administrative level, who has met the job performance requirements specified in this standard for Level III” (NFPA, 2003, p. 1021-6).

Fire Officer IV – “The fire officer, at the administrative level, who has met the job performance requirements specified in this standard for Level IV” (NFPA, 2003, p. 1021-6).

Research Question Procedures

The procedures for this ARP started during this author’s Executive Leadership course with a visit to the Learning Resource Center (LRC) at the National Fire Academy in Emmitsburg, Maryland. The LRC on-line card catalog was used to search for relevant publications addressing career development and succession planning. Internet searches also revealed numerous editorials of interest.

Research Question a Procedures

A review of National Fire Protection Association Standards relevant to firefighter fitness was conducted. These included Standards 1001, 1021 and 1041 specifically. The Standards were reviewed to determine what national criteria had been developed and to establish a baseline objective for the HFD. While Standard 1021 serves as the main document for fire officer professional qualifications, it is important to consider the context of both Standard 1001 and 1041 since they are referenced continually.

Research Question b Procedures

A review of the current HFD job descriptions for both the positions of Lieutenant and Captain were conducted. Both of these documents had recently been updated to reflect more accurately the responsibilities of these positions. Since the job descriptions are not a part of the
collective bargaining agreement, changes had been made without the input from the command staff or the union.

A review of the collective bargaining agreement between the Town of Hartford and the Hartford Career Firefighters, Local 2905 was conducted. Specifically, a recently developed amendment to the contract that discusses promotional procedures was examined to determine the agreed upon promotional qualifications.

In an effort to understand the expectations of the command staff of the HFD for the educational requirements for the positions of company and shift commanders, personal interviews were conducted with key individuals. M.A. Miller, Chief of the HFD was interviewed on August 28, 2007, to gather his opinions on the requirements for these positions. Since any change to the current practice will require his approval, the thoughts and recommendations of the Chief are critical to success. R.A. Bushey, Captain of the HFD, was interviewed on August 29, 2007, for his insights into educational requirements. Captain Bushey is the senior captain and has long served as the Departments’ Training Officer. Captain Bushey has attempted career development procedures in the past with very limited success. D.C. Rowlee, Secretary/Treasurer of the firefighters union was interviewed on August 30, 2007, to determine his opinions on educational requirements for these two ranks. Since the Union represents the personnel in both of these positions, it is imperative that the Union accepts and understands the reasoning for minimum levels of educational criteria for company and shift commanders. Each of the above mentioned interviews were conducted at the Hartford Fire Department and lasted for approximately one hour. The interviews entailed a general discussion on what each individual considered the necessary educational criteria for company and shift commanders.
A personal interview was conducted with G.A. Cutting (August 27, 2007) Chief of Police for the Town of Hartford. Chief Cutting was interviewed to determine the educational requirements that the police department utilizes for the positions of Sergeant and Captain. Both of these positions are similar in supervisory responsibility to those of the HFD, and thereby an investigation outside of the fire service is warranted. The interview was conducted at the Hartford Police facility and lasted for approximately 30 minutes.

**Research Question c Procedures**

In order to determine the minimum criteria used by similar sized departments for the positions of company and shift commanders a survey was developed and distributed to 50 departments located in four of the New England States. The survey was restricted to this area because the majority of these departments and their members are covered by a collective bargaining agreement and many of the issues involved with promotions would have already been addressed in their contracts. An online website provided by surveymonkey.com was utilized to develop the survey, and recipients could simply click a link to access the document. This site allows the author of the survey to customize the entire document as well as analyze the results. Since participants can quickly complete the survey and the author can instantly review the results, this device is an efficient and effective tool. A copy of the survey is located in Appendix A. The questions on the survey were developed to provide insight as to what educational criteria and certifications were being used to determine eligibility for promotion to either company or shift commanders. The survey was distributed via an e-mail list that had been acquired from the Secretary of the New England Division of the International Association of Fire Chiefs. This list included the fire chief for each of the departments selected. Respondents were requested to complete the survey as soon as possible. Departments whose e-mail addresses were determined
to be invalid were sent the survey via the U.S Postal Service. The survey respondents were selected by comparing population estimations provided by the U.S Census to determine similar sized communities, and then sources were checked to ensure each had fulltime fire suppression personnel. A total of 38 or 76% of the surveys were returned, and a list of those departments to which the survey was sent can be found in Appendix B.

Research Question d Procedures

The determination for what the educational criteria for company and shift commanders that the HFD should consider needs to represent accurately a mixture of the results of the previous three questions. Since it is imperative that any educational criteria set forth conforms to the NFPA Standards, these documents must be carefully considered. Further, the opinions of the key leaders within the HFD must be thoroughly weighed to ensure acceptance with the final outcome. Minimum requirements for any position can be a subject of debate, so it is crucial that the stakeholders understand the reasoning behind any proposal. Finally, the educational criteria set forth by similarly sized departments can provide valuable information to the HFD as this issue is considered. Validation from other departments provides reassurance that the criteria recommended in this proposal is consistent with other agencies, and not too stringent or too lenient.

Limitations

Secretary/Treasurer D.C. Rowlee represents the position of the Hartford Career Firefighters Association because this author currently serves as the Union’s President. In order to compose a completely objective review of educational requirement for the positions of company
and shift commander, it was necessary for this author to defer any personal opinion until adequate research had been completed.

Due to the limited time constraints on completing this research project, additional departments could not be surveyed for their criteria surrounding educational criteria for company and shift commanders. A broader range of surveys from across the Nation would have offered this author further insights into acceptable educational standards for these positions.

RESULTS

Research Question a Results

The National Fire Protection Association requirements for company and shift commanders are located in NFPA Standard 1021, Standard for Fire Officer Professional Qualifications (2003). This standard identifies the minimum job performance requirements for fire officers and recognizes four distinct levels of progression from fire officer I to fire officer IV. According to the Standard, a fire officer I operates at the supervisory level, the fire officer II operates at the supervisory/managerial level, the fire officer III operates at the managerial/administrative level, and the fire officer IV operates only at the administrative level. Each of these levels are clearly progressive from one to the next, and in order to meet the basic requirements for the fire officer I, the candidate must be certified at the Fire Fighter II as well as Fire Instructor I level.

NFPA 1021 (2003) also outlines the general prerequisite knowledge for each level of progression for fire service officers. Some of the areas identified in this category are those such as organizational structure, response districts, operational procedures, building codes, information management and record keeping. Further, the standard outlines some general skills required such as effective communications, writing skills to draft memos and letters, and the
ability to utilize the department’s informational management system. The Standard also sets forth other subject areas in which fire officers must be proficient. These topics include human resource management, community and government relations, administration, inspection and investigation, emergency service delivery, and health and safety. Within each of these subjects there are a variety of knowledge and skills identified in each category. Since the level of progression advances through the differing fire officer stages so does the depth of knowledge and ability required to meet the Standard.

Research Question b Results

The job description for the position of Lieutenant, also known as the company commander in the Hartford Fire Department, requires an “Associates Degree from an accredited university” (Town of Hartford, 2006a, p.2). It states however that, “equivalent combinations of education and experience will be considered relative to the degree requirement” (p. 2). The job description also requires five years total fire service experience, of which three must be as a paid member of the Hartford Fire Department. Vermont Firefighter II and Fire Officer I must be obtained within 18 months of appointment, and formal course work in the areas of leadership, tactical operations, human resource management, and hazardous materials are desired.

The job description for the position of Captain, also known as the shift commander in the Hartford Fire Department, requires an “Associates Degree in the Fire Protection Discipline or related field from an accredited university” (Town of Hartford, 2006b, p. 2). However the job description further states that, “an equivalent combination of education and experience may be considered” (p. 2). It also outlines as a requirement a minimum of five years of career service with the department, of which two are at the rank of Lieutenant. The job description provides a listing of additional course work that is desirable such as, incident command, apparatus design,
fire protection systems, and fire protection practices. It also requires the candidate to obtain Vermont Fire Officer II within 18 months of appointment.

According to the collective bargaining agreement between the Town of Hartford (2007) and the firefighters Union, there are no educational requirements for the positions of Lieutenant or Captain. The contract simply requires the same length of service minimums that are mentioned in the above-mentioned job descriptions. However, the contract does provide bonus points during the promotional testing process for those candidates who have acquired a college degree. An Associates degree is worth, one bonus point, a Bachelor’s degree is worth 3 bonus points and for the Captains position only, a Master’s degree is recognized and is worth five bonus points. Educational degrees do not need to be fire service related to qualify for the extra points.

A personal interview was conducted with M.A. Miller, Fire Chief for the Town of Hartford, on August 28, 2007. Chief Miller is a strong proponent of higher education and believes that formal education and fire service training courses provide a valuable benefit for aspiring officers. However, Chief Miller is not comfortable making a college degree a mandatory requirement for promotion. Due to the small size of the Hartford Fire Department and the fact that often competent personnel are available without a degree, Chief Miller prefers to cast a wide net allowing almost anyone with sufficient years of service to test. Chief Miller further believes that it is a combination of education, experience and work ethic that creates the true indicator of great fire officers. He also states that it is important for individuals to understand learning is a lifelong process, and that to succeed one cannot rest on any one particular credential such as a degree or a certification. In the end it is the combination of formal education, certifications, work history, and attitude that guides Chief Miller in making the decision on whom to promote.
A personal interview was conducted with R.A. Bushey, senior Captain and Training Officer with the Hartford Fire Department on August 29, 2007. Captain Bushey has been involved in the fire service for over 30 years and has taken many courses offered at the state and national level. Captain Bushey does not hold a college degree. Captain Bushey (personal communication, August 29, 2007) believes that it is extremely important for leaders both at the company and shift level to acquire a college degree before being eligible for promotion. Further he does not support the use of loopholes as commonly seen in agencies that allow an equivalent combination of experience and education to be considered. While Captain Bushey concedes that college education does not make one a great fire ground officer, it does play a vital role in every other aspect of an officers position. The company and shift commanders of today must deal with other individuals from a variety of professional organizations. They must also work in prevention, write grants and draft formal reports that are scrutinized by many including supervisors and attorneys. A solid college education helps fire officers to level the playing field with those in other professional agencies. Finally, Captain Bushey states that in order to comprehend items such as training directives, technology, standing orders, and operating procedures officers in today’s fire service must be better prepared; and this is best completed through formal education.

A personal interview was conducted with D.C. Rowlee, Secretary/Treasurer of the Hartford Career Firefighters Association on August 30, 2007. Secretary/Treasurer Rowlee believes college education is just one of the important factors that help to determine the potential success of any fire officer. While he certainly agrees education is important and encourages members to obtain a degree, he is not confident requiring a college degree for promotion is in the best interest of the firefighters Union. The current contract provides a benefit for those who do
have a degree in the form of bonus points during the promotional exam. Any further restriction on minimum qualifications beyond length of service would only serve to limit the number of candidates eligible. Secretary/Treasurer Rowlee would be open to further discussion on minimum qualifications for company and shift commanders as long as ample time was provided to allow members to obtain these new requirements, or that current members are excluded from the new mandate.

A personal interview was conducted with G.A. Cutting, Chief of Police for the Town of Hartford, on August 27, 2007. Chief Cutting (personal communication, August 27, 2007) advised that the only requirements that the Hartford Police Department has for promotion to the rank of either Sergeant or Captain is a high school diploma and certification as a fulltime law enforcement officer by the State of Vermont. Chief Cutting formally served as a Captain in the Vermont State Police, which does require an Associates degree in order to be eligible for any higher rank. Due to the small size of the Hartford Police Department staff, Chief Cutting does not believe it would be feasible to require a college degree for ascension to differing ranks. Chief Cutting believes time in grade and personal performance are acceptable indicators of the ability to perform as a leader.

Research Question c Results

In order to determine the educational criteria used by similarly sized departments for the positions of company and shift commanders, a survey was developed and distributed to 50 departments located in four of the New England States. A total of 38 responses were received, and of those 26 or 68% replied that their department did have minimum educational or certifications required for those wishing to test for company and/or shift commander positions. The follow data was gathered from the returned surveys.
The question of whether the department utilizes company commanders, shift commanders or both resulted in 15 that use company commanders, 11 that use shift commanders and seven that use one position to serve both roles.

In terms of educational requirements for company commanders, the data presented in Table 1 indicates the results of the respondents. Only three of the department required a college degree to test for this position, and an Associate degree was the level of degree chosen. The required Associates degree did need to be fire service related in order to meet the requirement. As far as length of service requirements for company commander positions, the majority, 13 respondents, provided that five years of service was required. This was next followed by a three year requirement by four of the respondents. The remaining respondents varied for one to four years of service.

Table 1

Educational Requirements for Company Commanders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Certification Required</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Firefighter I</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firefighter II</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire Inspector I</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire Instructor I</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire Officer I</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire Officer II</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of educational requirements for shift commanders the data presented in Table 2 indicates the results of the respondents. Only one of the departments requires a college degree to test for this position, and an Associate degree was the level of degree chosen. The required
Associates degree did not need to be fire service related in order to meet the requirement. As far as length of service requirements for shift commander positions, the common theme was either three or five years of service as a company commander before being permitted to test for this higher position. There was a slight variation for this because just six departments required greater than five or no minimum years of service as a requirement.

Table 2

Educational Requirements for Shift Commanders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Certification Required</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Firefighter I</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firefighter II</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire Inspector I</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire Instructor I</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire Officer I</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire Officer II</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Question d Results

In an effort to determine what are the educational criteria for company and shift commanders that the HFD should consider implementing, it is extremely important to ensure the needs of all stakeholders are met. In the HFD this means that both the administration and the Union must agree on minimum requirements as well as which areas of study are most important. Personal interviews with M.A. Miller, Fire Chief and D.C. Rowlee, Secretary/Treasurer of the Union provided valuable input into this process; and a review of the NFPA standards relevant to fire officers provided additional documentation. The results of the surveys distributed to
departments throughout New England offered another viewpoint that can be included in formulating the correct process.

Both M.A. Miller (personal communication, August 28, 2007) and D.C Rowlee (personal communication, August 30, 2007) agree that requiring a college degree for promotion to either a company or shift commander’s position is not feasible. While both concede formal education is critical in today’s environment, neither believe the HFD has the capacity to make it a requirement of promotion. Instead, they believe that encouraging college education and stating it as preferred is the better avenue to pursue at this point. This position is contradictory with the requirements of the National Professional Development Model (Crawford, 2006), which states those at the Fire Officer II level, shift commanders, need to have at least an Associate’s degree. Further, both agree that a combination of education and experience is often the best indicator of effective fire officers. In order to achieve this, length of service requirements prior to permitting testing should be enforced, and members should be encouraged to take class work in a variety of fields to prepare themselves for the responsibilities of the new positions.

A review of the surveys indicated that few departments required a college degree for the positions of company or shift commanders. In fact, the majority only require personnel to obtain the Firefighter II as the minimum level of certification. This directly contradicts the information set forth in both the NFPA 1021 Standard (2003) and the National Professional Development Model (Crawford, 2006). Both of these publications outline the Fire Officer I and II certification as the minimum requirement for company and shift officers respectfully.
DISCUSSION

Relationship Between Study Results and Literature

Based upon the information gathered in conducting this research project, this author concludes that the current lack of any formal educational requirements in the HFD is not unusual compared to other fire departments; however, it does contradict those outlined in nationally accepted standards. NFPA 1021 (2003), clearly outlines the varying levels of fire officer certification as well as the responsibilities expected at each of these positions. The Standard also describes many areas of course study that individuals need prior to certification at any of the fire officer levels. These areas include human resource management, community and government relations, administration, inspection and investigation, emergency service delivery and health and safety.

The job description for the position of Lieutenant the Hartford Fire Department requires an “Associates Degree from an accredited university” (Town of Hartford, 2006a, p. 2), and the job description for the position of Captain requires an “Associates Degree in the Fire Protection Discipline or related field from an accredited university” (Town of Hartford, 2006b, p. 2). However, both of these requirements are negated with the following that appears in both job descriptions, “equivalent combinations of education and experience will be considered relative to the degree requirements” (p. 2). The job descriptions also state, “other formal courses in instruction, leadership, management, incident command, strategic and tactical operation of fire and rescue resources, human resource management, hazardous materials management, building construction, planning, fire protection systems, apparatus and equipment design, fire prevention practices, etc., are also desirable” (p. 2). These courses are very similar to those areas of study described in NFPA 1021 (2003).
The personal interview conducted with M.A. Miller, Fire Chief (personal communication, August 28, 2007), provided some valuable insights into what qualities and requirements are expected for promotions in the HFD. Chief Miller’s philosophy that education is a lifelong process that needs continual attention is directly supported by Broman (2005) who states, “professional development is a never ending journey not a destination” (p. 31). Additionally, Chief Miller’s view that it is a combination of education and experience needed to create excellent fire officers is defended by Cochran (2006) who offers, “the lack of a holistic approach to leadership development is exemplified by counterproductive mindsets like every man for himself, leaders who have their favorite few, and of course, simple narcissism” (p. 84).

Finally, the use of educational bonus or reward points as outlined in the collective bargaining agreement is a mechanism both to reward higher education as well as encourage members to obtain formal college degrees. Shouldris (2005) states, “reward points are often awarded on promotional exams based on Associate and Bachelors degrees” and that “many times, the reward points are the difference between success and failure in the promotional process” (p. 69). If members were aware of the effect these points have on the entire process, it may motivate those without degrees to enroll in available programs.

**Interpretation of Results**

An interpretation of the results of this study leads this author to conclude that the HFD, not unlike many fire departments, has not placed enough focus on the issue of career development and educational planning for aspiring officers. The results of the surveys clearly indicated that college education is not a mandatory condition of promotion. This strongly contradicts most other professional occupations where the leader is expected to have formal education. Attempting to understand the numerous requirements of today’s fire service and
dealing with the mixture of other professionals, requires fire service leaders to have a firm grasp of both oral and written communications. Many of these skills needed are honed in the college settings. While there could be numerous excuses made for past failures to address this problem, there is no legitimate excuse for failing to remedy the problem now. Succession planning has been brought to the forefront as a fire service problem, and there are a variety of ways in which to proceed. The problems future fire officers will face are much different than those of the past, so every effort must be made to prepare our next generation of leaders.

The need for educational planning by fire officers is clearly outlined in both the NFPA 1021 Standard and the National Professional Development Model. NPFA 1021 (2003) identifies the key competencies needed for certification at the varying fire officer levels. Fire Officers and their departments need to utilize this Standard as a benchmark to determine qualifications for promotions. Further, the National Professional Development Model (Crawford, 2006) provides valuable insights for aspiring officers. Crawford (2006) offers, “the concept is based on a continuum of professional development that begins with training, moves onto certification and culminates in higher education” (p. 210). The responsibilities and expectations placed on fire officers are too great for on the job training. These individuals are expected to make split second decision with limited information, often times requiring their personnel be place in harms way. Today’s fire officers need to have the tools available to perform these function or people die. It is really that simple.

Personal interviews with both the fire chief and the union representative provided insights as to their concerns for educational planning and college degree requirements for future promotions. The support of these two individuals is key to the success of any new requirements placed on candidates. Their opinions are critical and must be carefully considered before
proceeding with any new provisions. Change in the fire service is often difficult, and at times small steps need to be taken to proceed at all. Having the support of the training officer is helpful, and the stakeholders may be swayed if accurate, effective information is provided. Everyone must agree that the key mission is to prepare our next generation of fire officers better in order to succeed. This is possible when stakeholders focus on the larger picture and the long term needs of the organization.

**Organizational Implications**

One of the greatest organizational implications of the research gathered in the project is that the HFD and the Union are now acutely aware of the requirements of the NFPA 1021 (2003) Standard and the National Professional Development Model (Crawford, 2006). The HFD has been a local leader in many areas in the past, and now that the stakeholders are aware of these recommendations for fire officers, both sides will hopefully take action to advance the issue. The labor/management relations in the organization are very positive with both often agreeing to strive for betterment instead of failing to advance. By calling attention to this problem, the stakeholders will work to ensure future leaders are fully aware of the educational needs of leadership positions.

The establishment of a formal educational plan for aspiring fire officers would ensure future leaders are compliant with the requirements of NFPA 1021 (2003). Further, it would provide a clear educational path for those wishing to advance to the next level in the leadership continuum. No longer would employees have to guess as to which courses or certifications would best serve them, or provide them with the greatest chance for promotion. Instead, members would know these particular items are needed as a baseline for the position, and
without them promotion is not possible. This evens the playing field, and members understand
the direction the organization is moving.

Finally the adoption of a formal education plan and criteria for future promotions would
help to ensure the long term success of the organization. Developing the next generation of
leaders is critical in the fire service today, and it is the responsibility of the present leadership to
ensure this assignment is completed. It is not acceptable to place unprepared individuals in key
positions where their incorrect actions could result in the loss of life and/or increased property
damage. The tools required for these positions are known, and a failure to act accordingly today
should not be tolerated. Those wishing to advance deserve every possible chance to succeed;
especially since our organizations will eventually need them at the helm. If this is done, the
organization will succeed for generations to come.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of the research completed in this study, the overall recommendation is that the
collective bargaining agreement between the Town of Hartford and the Hartford Career
Firefighters Association be adjusted to address the minimum qualifications for the positions of
Lieutenant and Captain. Both parties truly need to understand the requirements and demands
placed on these fire officers, and then develop minimum educational qualifications that meet
these expectations. No longer is using simple length of service as the main criteria valid in this
rapidly changing profession. However, to best accommodate this change, the parties should
allow incumbent members ample time before instilling these new minimum qualifications as
mandatory. A rolling timeframe that would require all personnel to meet the new standard in five
years should provide enough time for existing members to complete necessary course work. This
concession will help with stakeholder buy-in. Once this timeframe has passed, however,
members will need these new certifications and/or educational degrees prior to testing for an officer’s position.

In terms of the Lieutenant’s position, also known as the company commander, the minimum qualifications should be altered to reflect those in the National Professional Development Model (Crawford, 2006). The qualifications in this model for this rank indicate that members need to be certified at the Fire Officer I level, and are not in need of a college degree. Those achieving Fire Officer I certification need to have already passed the Firefighter I & II examinations as well as Fire Instructor I because these are pre-requisites for certification. The Fire Officer I level will provide the company commander with the necessary skills to supervise the shift and make tactical decisions in the early stages of incidents. The HFD should work with the Vermont Fire Academy either to host the Fire Officer Program on site, or at a minimum keep members informed of when the course is offered. While a formal degree is not mandatory, candidates for this position should be required to have completed a college English composition course. Following the recommendation of Smoke (1998), it is imperative that officers have the ability to effectively write, and this style course can be of great assistance.

The National Professional Development Model (Crawford, 2006) should also be used to establish the minimum qualifications for the Captain’s or shift commander’s position. According to this document, officers at this rank should obtain Fire Officer II certification as well as have completed an Associates degree. Since officers at this rank operate more as managers than supervisors, it is imperative that they have the skills to conduct the work required of the position. This includes the ability to think critically as well as effective written and oral communications. These traits can be honed through the college education process. Additionally, the Fire Officer II certification is achievable through the Vermont Fire Academy; so it is easily achieved. Again,
the HFD should continue its relationship with the Vermont Fire Academy to ensure members are aware of this course offering, or if possible, host the class.

The Department should enter into an agreement with either the Community College of Vermont or Vermont Technical College to offer courses to fire service personnel. The Community College has a campus in the Town of Hartford, so taking courses there would be extremely easy. Members could take many of the general education classes that will be of great benefit. Vermont Technical College now offers a Fire Science degree, so members could enroll in that program as well. While this campus is some 30 minutes away, the college may be willing to offer offsite classes at the HFD if enough participation could be guaranteed. Either way, these two institutions, or the many online college programs available would make completing a degree possible for members who choose.

Finally, the HFD should work to establish a formal mentoring program to prepare members to reach the next level of progression. The HFD has many talented individuals who would enjoy the ability to mentor a junior firefighter or fire officer and assist them in preparation for the next level of responsibility. This mentoring can assist future candidates to understand the responsibilities of the positions as well as how to handle problems that may arise. It is much easier to work through some of these conflicts with the assistance of a coach or mentor than having to face the problem alone, and hope to make the right choice. This is especially important during the early years of ones leadership role. Often mistakes that are made when first promoted can haunt the officer throughout his/her career. Effective mentoring reduces the chance for this to occur, and it is the responsibility of incumbent officers to train their replacements in order to have an organization that will thrive for years to come.
Future readers interested in studying educational criteria for company and shift officers must understand that in order to implement it successfully within your own department, all stakeholders must be included. Additionally, it is critical that the use of nationally accepted standards be utilized in order to ensure that the program is validated. The fire service has been slow to adopt minimum educational standards, and it may be difficult to determine what the criteria should be. However, with progressive, “out of the box” thinking, it is possible to develop an educational plan that can be used to develop quality fire officers who can manage the organizational needs not only of today, but of the future. This is the best way to ensure healthy organizations for years to come.
REFERENCES


Dear Participant:

My name is Steven Locke. I am a Lieutenant, employed by the Hartford Fire Department in Hartford, Vermont, and currently enrolled in the National Fire Academy’s Executive Fire Officer Program. I am researching educational planning for aspiring officers. As part of my research I have developed a survey on your department’s educational requirements for promotions. It would be greatly appreciated if you would please complete the survey as soon as possible.

Thank you

1. Does your department have minimum educational criteria or certifications for those wishing to test for company and/or shift commander positions?
   - □ Yes
   - □ No

   Note: If you answered No to question 1, clicking next will end the survey. Please still submit this survey as your answers are an important part of this project.

2. Does your department utilize? (check all that apply)
   - □ Company Commanders
   - □ Shift Commanders
   - □ One position serves both roles

   If one position serves both roles, please complete the information for the company commander’s position only.

3. In terms of company commanders, what are the minimum educational criteria your department requires? (select all that apply)
   - □ Firefighter I
   - □ Firefighter II
   - □ Fire Inspector I
   - □ Fire Instructor I
   - □ Fire Officer I
   - □ Fire Officer II
   - Other (please specify)

4. Do you require a college degree in order to test for the position of company commander?
   - □ Yes
   - □ No
5. If you answered yes to question 4, what level of college degree is required?
   - Associates Degree
   - Bachelors Degree

6. If you answered yes to question 4, does the college degree need to be fire service related?
   - Yes
   - No

7. In terms of shift commanders what are the minimum educational criteria your department requires? (select all that apply)
   - Firefighter I
   - Firefighter II
   - Fire Inspector I
   - Fire Instructor I
   - Fire Officer I
   - Fire Officer II
   - Other (please specify)

8. Do you require a college degree in order to test for the position of shift commander?
   - Yes
   - No

9. If you answered yes to question 8, what level of college degree is required?
   - Associates Degree
   - Bachelors Degree

10. If you answered yes to question 8, does the college degree need to be fire service related?
    - Yes
    - No

11. How many years of service are required before a firefighter can test for a company commander’s position?
    - None
    - 1
    - 2
    - 3
    - 4
    - 5
    - Greater than 5
12. How many years as a company officer must an individual complete before being eligible for a shift commanders position?

☐ 1
☐ 2
☐ 3
☐ 4
☐ 5
☐ Greater than 5

I would like to thank you for your assistance with this research project. Should you have any questions feel free to contact me. I can be reached at 802-295-3232 or via e-mail at slcke@hartford-vt.org.

Thanks Again
Steven Locke
Lieutenant
# APPENDIX B: LIST OF FIRE DEPARTMENTS SURVEYED

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fire Department</th>
<th>Location</th>
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