

Performance Measurement in New Smyrna Beach Fire Rescue

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Abstract

The problem investigated through this research was that New Smyrna Beach Fire Rescue does not have a performance measurement system in place that is commensurate with some of the basic recommendations made by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). The purpose of the research was to identify potential methods for improving the employee performance evaluation system in the organization. To achieve this goal the following research questions were used:

1. What impact will a new performance evaluation system have on outcomes for professionalism in the fire department?
2. How is change undertaken in the fire department?
3. What organizational structures and/or variables will impede or facilitate the change process?
4. What improvements can be made to the fire department organization to change programs initiated in the future?

A descriptive study employing informal focus group interviews of employee working in the organization was conducted to answer the research questions. The results of the investigation suggest that the culture of the organization may be an impediment to the development of a new employee performance evaluation system. The implications of these findings are discussed and recommendations are made to focus on changes in management and leadership practice in the organization.

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Introduction

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) outlines the role and importance of developing and using performance measures as a pertinent tool for improving both the function of the fire department and the overall contribution made by each employee in the organization (Flynn, 2009). Although the organization notes the importance of developing a performance measurement system that is tailored to meet the unique needs of the department and the community, there are some basic recommendations made by the NFPA which provide a framework for developing a performance measurement system. For instance, the NFPA recommends the development of a performance measurement system based on the four core functions of the fire department. Evaluation of performance in each of these areas can provide additional insight into the particular outcomes that can and are being achieved by the fire department.

At the present time, the New Smyrna Beach Fire Rescue does not have a performance measurement system in place that is commensurate with some of the basic recommendations made by the NFPA for improving outcomes in this area. Using this problem as a basis for investigation, the purpose of the current research was to identify potential methods for improving the employee performance evaluation system in the organization.

In order to achieve this goal, this descriptive research project utilizes the following questions to guide the investigation:

The research questions for this investigation are as follows:

1. What impact will a new performance evaluation system have on outcomes for professionalism in the fire department?
2. How is change undertaken in the fire department?

3. What organizational structures and/or variables will impede or facilitate the change process?
4. What improvements can be made to the fire department organization to improve change programs initiated in the future?

Background and Significance

Careful examination of employee performance and its role and importance in the organization demonstrates that this variable plays a significant role in shaping a wide range of outcomes for the organization. Generally speaking, employee performance shapes the overall productivity and outputs achieved by the organization (Cho, 2008). Further, in service organizations, employee performance can serve as a foundation for positive improvement in the service provided to customers. If employee performance is high and employees are appropriately motivated, the end result can be increased performance for the organization, improved customer satisfaction with the organization, a positive organizational culture and positive outcomes for employees including increased job satisfaction and organizational engagement (Cho, 2008).

While many of these benefits have direct implications for the development of fire service organizations, Flynn (2009) writing on behalf of the NFPA, notes that measuring employee performance has been shown to impact seven distinct areas for fire department function. These include: evaluation, control, budgeting, motivating, promoting, celebrating and learning. These outcomes, according to Flynn (2009), have become imperative for fire service organizations as these institutions must ensure the proper use of public resources while maintaining a high level of safety for employees and those served by the organization. Overall, performance measurement is a cornerstone for the development of the modern fire service organization.

With the realization that performance measurement has such notable implications for the development and success of the fire service organization, the significance of the current research

lies in providing a more integral understanding of how performance measurement can be improved in the fire service organization. Using the New Smyrna Beach Fire Rescue service as a case study for investigation, it will be possible not only to identify particular areas in which improving performance measures will augment service, but also to identify key areas and aspects of the organization that may impede or prohibit the development of an effective performance measurement system. Based on the results obtained from this investigation, it should be possible to establish recommendations to help both the New Smyrna Beach Fire Rescue and other fire departments develop and implement effective employee performance measurement systems. The systems will be commensurate with NFPA guidelines and viable for improving employee and organizational outcomes.

Literature Review

Introduction

The issue of employee performance is one that has notable implications for all organizations. A cursory overview of the scholarly literature regarding employee performance and employee performance measurement demonstrates that there is a broad scope of research available regarding this topic. The literature review presented here provides a review of this literature considering the benefits of employee performance measurement and the specific issues involved in developing a successful employee measurement system. This review is followed by an examination of fire departments as organizations and the importance of performance measurement in these institutions. Through a careful examination of what has been noted on these subjects, it will be possible to provide a comprehensive theoretical background for supporting the current research project.

The Benefits of Performance Measurement

Researchers examining the benefits of performance measurement in the organization have consistently noted the importance of measurement as a means to improve outcomes for the organization (Liu, 2009). According to Clark, Abela & Ambler (2006) performance measurement provides feedback to all employees and departments in the organization to improve operations. By identifying the strengths and weaknesses of an organization and its employees, an effort can be made to improve, alter and augment outcomes. Feedback, as noted by Clark et al. (2006) is foundational to the development and evolution of the organization over the long-term.

In an effort to quantify the benefits of performance measurement, Eisenkopf (2009) examined the use of quantitative performance measurement systems in various public sector agencies. The results obtained by Eisenkopf demonstrate that performance measurement can provide the public sector organization with important information that can be used for planning, control and budgeting. Based on the outcomes of performance measurement, organizations can evaluate operations more comprehensively and garner a better understanding of how resources are allocated and utilized. For the public organization these issues are pertinent because limited resources can create challenges for effective operation of the organization. In general, performance measurement does provide a formidable tool for improving outcomes in a number of pertinent areas of the organization's operations.

Mausolff (2008) demonstrates similar results in his investigation of performance measures used in the public sector. As noted by Mausolff, performance measurement is essential for public organizations because it not only serves as the basis to improve efficiency in operations but also this practice provides a means "to illustrate to the public the government

works for them” (p. 593). Mausolff goes on to note that performance measurement has become such an important and integral component of the public organization that many agencies now tie this process to budgeting. By doing so, Mausolff asserts that public organizations achieve a higher degree of accountability and transparency; two issues that are important for public sector operations in the modern political and economic climate.

Research regarding the application of performance measurement in the public sector organization has also been provided by Van Heldge, Johnsen and Vakkuri (2008). Specifically, these authors review the impact of performance measurement on outcomes for the public sector organization, noting the implications of this process for the conceptualization and operation of public agencies. As noted by Heldge et al. (2008) : “Performance measurement is understood as an instrument for indicating efficiency and effectiveness and—due to the public sector context—also equity” (p. 642). These authors go on to argue that performance measurement provides a foundation for the organization to increase “decision making rationality” and to engage in efficient planning and control operations that improve accountability and facility policy redesign.

Building Successful Employee Measurement Programs

Despite the fact that performance measurement is such an important issue for the success of the organization, developing effective and efficient employee measurement programs remains a notable challenge in many instances. Chang (2006) argues that employee performance evaluation systems often fail to provide enough information to employee about what changes are needed to improve performance. Additionally, Chang notes that data collected in the performance evaluation process is often not applied in a timely manner, making it difficult for the organization to effectively improve its workforce to achieve desired results.

Maylett and Riboldi (2007) also consider the challenges that exist in creating effective employee performance measurements. According to these authors, evaluation of employee performance typically focuses on what was accomplished. While a focus on “what” does indicate if specific goals were attained by the employee, Maylett and Riboldi argue that this type of information is not enough to drive change and improvement in the organization. Rather than just evaluating whether or not objectives were met by the organization, Maylett and Riboldi argue that efforts are needed to evaluate how objectives and goals are met. Understanding the “how” of goal achievement provides additional insight into operations and the manner in which resources are used for goal achievement.

Nickols (2007) further notes the employee performance measurement systems can be damaging to employee morale, problematic for the development of the employee and fraught with emotional anguish and anxiety for the employee. In order to improve the outcomes of employee performance measurement, Nickols (2007) argues that these systems must contain some basic features that establish the system as a support for employees and the organization. Specifically, Nickols argues that performance measurement systems must be based on measurable objectives that are directly related to the employee’s job. These objectives can be established based on: industry standards, the needs of the organization and/or the description of the employee’s occupation and job. Establishment of an employee performance measurement system in this manner should, according to Nichols provide managers and leaders with an unbiased, goal-focused tool that can be used to augment employee and organizational performance.

Jawahar (2007) further examines that factors that contribute to success in the development and implementation of an employee performance measurement system. In

particular, this author notes the issue of fairness and how the performance measurement system can impact employee perceptions of fairness in the organization. In many instances, employee performance measurement systems do not provide unbiased forms for evaluating the employee. This is due to the fact that the measures used to evaluate employee performance do not focus on specific goals, objectives and outcomes. Jawahar asserts that by anchoring performance evaluation to quantifiable and measurable objectives, fairness in the performance measurement process can be augmented.

The Fire Department as an Organization

A review of what has been noted about fire departments as organizations suggests that while empirical research in this area is scant, scholars have identified some unique aspects of the fire department's culture and environment that are pertinent to consider in this research. For instance, Wallace (2006) notes that the culture in the fire department is often focused on a core set of values. These values provide the foundation for operation and management of the department and shape individual response to organizational change and development. Specifically, Wallace reports that "The organization is more concerned about adhering to the value system to achieve desired outcomes than it is about achieving uniformity in the process each working unit goes through to achieve success" (p. 11-12). Wallace goes on to note that in this environment, focus on the achievement of excellence rather than on the rules is needed to achieve results. This does not imply that there are no rules, policies or guidelines; rather it implies that the culture of the organization does not necessarily support these structures as a foundation for organizational development and operation.

Cook (2002) also provides a review of the culture and structure that exists in the fire department, noting the hierarchy which is commonly found in these organizations. According to

Cook, fire department structure and culture is deeply rooted in a bureaucratic framework in which older members of the organization typically serve as leaders and managers. In this process, senior members of the organization become custodians of the organization's culture, beliefs and values. These attributes become established and operationalized through practice, and leaders often set the tone for how members of the organization behave and respond. While this type of environment can serve as a foundation for preserving tradition in the fire department, Cook notes that modern changes in government and public service have created some challenges and problems for these organizations.

An examination of the specific challenges facing fire departments in this modern age indicates that diversity issues are of particular concern (Cook, 2002). In particular, Cook notes that the established culture and values of fire department organizations can serve as an impediment to change, creating barriers for diversity development. Although the current investigation does not specifically address the issue of diversity, it does seek to evaluate the impediments to change that can impact outcomes for development employee performance measures. The insight provided by Cook in this research does suggest that deeply established culture and values in the fire department organization may make it difficult to create the change needed for improvement and advancement in the area of employee performance measurement.

De Lisi (2005) further examines the scope and context of culture and operations in the fire department. As reported by this author, the culture of the fire department is one that is difficult and challenging to change. Although training and development are provided for professionals working in this environment, De Lisi (2005) reports that a prevailing attitude of "we've always done it like this" remains (p. 119). While this general attitude does preserve the traditions of the fire service that are important to those that work in these organizations, Di Lisi

notes that the culture is one which does create some challenges for change and improvement. To improve outcomes, Di Lisi notes that there are some important steps that can be taken by leaders in these organizations. In addition to improving two-way communication in the organization De Lisi notes the importance of strengthening employee feedback loops. Evaluations of employee performance are needed to provide a comprehensive and succinct review of employee performance and to identify areas for change and improvement.

The Role of Employee Performance Measurement

The information provided by De Lisi (2005) does provide some insight into the role and importance of evaluating employee performance in the fire department organization. Additional insight provided by Fay (2010) further strengthens the argument for creating effective and efficient employee performance measurement systems in the fire department. Specifically, Fay reports that a comprehensive performance measurement system can provide the organization with a means to evaluate both outcomes for meeting the public's needs and quantitative data to evaluate the utilization of resources. Based on data collected in these processes, fire department organizations will be better prepared to weather tough economic times and ensure that they are meeting the needs of the communities that they serve.

Despite the overall benefits associated with improving employee performance measures, Coleman (2008) argues that most fire departments fail to develop and implement an effective system for evaluation. Without these systems in place, Coleman argues fire departments lack access to vital information that can be used to improve employee performance and increase efficiency in the organization. Coleman asserts that the decision to improve employee performance measures for the organization should be based on the recognition of the overall benefits that can be garnered from the process. While change in this area can be difficult,

Coleman asserts that the change will provide a number of supports that will enhance the ability of the fire department to better manage resources, personnel and community relations.

Summary

Synthesis of the literature provided here does indicate that the development and implementation of an effective employee performance measurement system is important to all organizations, including the fire department. In the public sector, the implementation of these types of measures is essential not only for effective and efficient organizational operation, but also these programs are needed to help ensure that accountability and transparency are established to maintain trust in public institutions. Although there is a general agreement that employee performance measurement is an important part of successful organizational development, creating effective performance evaluation programs remains a notable challenge. Success in this area appears to be contingent upon the creation of program that is specific to needs of the organization and capable of providing quantitative, measurable results that are relevant to the day-to-day activities of the employee.

Procedures

Introduction

For the purposes of this investigation a descriptive framework was employed to collect data regarding the current employee performance measurement system utilized at the New Smyrna Beach Fire Rescue unit. Simple descriptive research was selected as the principle framework for this investigation because of the desire to better understand both the current employee performance measurement system in the organization and the particular elements of organizational culture that may contribute to challenges in reforming or improving the current

performance measurement system. The descriptive research design provides an opportunity for data collection without manipulation to better understand the organization as it currently exists.

Population/Sample

The population for this investigation included all employees currently working at the New Smyrna Beach Fire Rescue organization. The sample was selected from this larger population and was chosen based on the willingness of employees to take part in the research process. Of the 62 employees that currently work in the organization, 23 were willing to participate in the research. This sample included a broad range of organizational members from first year employees to members of the management team working in the organization. The range of experience ensures that all opinions included in the investigation were comprehensive and representative of the entire population currently working in the organization.

Data Collection

Data collection for this investigation took place in an informal manner through the use of focus groups. Employees agreeing to take part in the research project agreed to be informally interviewed with three or four other coworkers. These interviews were typically conducted during the employee's shifts at their stations. Focus group interviews were conducted in an informal manner and followed the general outline found in Appendix A. The tone and focus of the interviews was one that was conversational to promote active interaction and debate among those involved in the interview process.

In order to capture data from these interviews, the focus groups were audio taped and transcribed. The audio tapes were transcribed within 24 hours of the completion of the data collection to ensure that the information from the interviews remained fresh in the researcher's mind. During the interview process the researcher also kept a journal of field notes that recorded

subject body language and emphasis on particular issues or concerns. This information was recorded in the margins of the transcripts to provide a better grasp of the actual interview process and the responses of the subjects. Six informal focus group interviews were completed over the course of a three week period. Schedules were used to coordinate the interview times. The interviews ranged in length from 60 to 90 minutes.

Data Analysis

Data analysis for this investigation focused on content analysis of the interviews to identify key themes related to employee performance measures currently used in the organization. Each of the six interviews was first reviewed to provide a general overview of content and to identify common themes noted by the subjects participating in the interviews. A content review sheet for each interview was developed, outlining the salient points of each of the interviews. The content sheets were then used as a basis for comparison to identify themes prominent to most or all of the subjects interviewed. Themes identified in at least three of the six content sheets were included in the final review of the employee performance measurement system currently being used in the organization. Information from the six content sheets was synthesized to provide the final case for this investigation.

Limitations

With regard to the limitations of the current research, it is evident that the sample size and sampling method both have implications for the generalizability and application of the results. Although the sample used for this investigation represented 37 percent of the employees working in the organization, this sample size is small. Given that such a small sample was used, it is possible that the results obtained may not be reflective of the entire group working at the fire department. Additionally, convenience sampling was the primary method used for acquiring the

sample. Convenience samples are not representative of the larger population (in this case fire fighters). As such, this may make the data difficult to generalize across the entire population of fire departments. Results obtained may be best applied to the New Smyrna Beach Fire Rescue unit than to other fire departments in other locations.

Results

Introduction

The results for this investigation were obtained from the six focus group interviews that were conducted. The data from the interviews was synthesized into a final case study. In an effort to present the information in a manner that effectively describes the themes and issues noted, the content of the interview questions (Appendix A) that were used to guide the informal interviews was employed to provide a general understanding of the content collected. The results presented here focus on the major themes investigated through the focus group interviews, identifying where consensus and debate was present for the subjects.

Themes

Impressions of the Employee Performance Measurement System

Responses regarding the employee performance measurement system at the fire department were generally uniform across all of the subjects. Most employees interviewed agreed that the system had been established as a means to provide a basis for annual raises, evaluate performance for promotions, and protect the organization in the event that it needed to terminate an employee. Employees working for the department noted some degree of anxiety over the system due to the fact that their raises would be impacted by the outcomes of the evaluation. Most agreed that staying on the “good side” of the lieutenants and battalion was the best way to get a positive evaluation.

Advantages of the System

With regard to the advantages of the system, many of the subjects interviewed believed that the use of the performance management system had become a tradition for the department. The performance measurement system had been established as a means for each employee to meet with the battalion at least once a year to review problems or issues facing the employee. Many of the respondents noted that this process provided them with the opportunity to get to know the battalion more personally. For some employees this was the only time that they had to spend with the battalion and because the battalion's opinion of the employee was important for the evaluation process and raise, many felt that building a relationship with the battalion was one of the most important parts of the process. A few subjects noted that the system did enable the department to more easily terminate employees when the need arose. Termination of employees from the department could be a challenge because of union regulations.

Problems with the System

Evaluation of the themes noted with regard to problems with the system demonstrated that many of the respondents noted anxiety with the system as a significant issue. Some of the respondents reported that they often did not have a clear sense of where they stood with the battalion creating anxiety over the size of their raise, while others noted that if something negative had happened in recent weeks they worried that it would impact their evaluation. One respondent made the following observation:

I left my oxygen tank at the station and I needed it on a call. I couldn't do my job right. I knew that I had made a mistake and I knew that it would make it harder for me to get a raise. If it had happened a week after my evaluation or six months before, I don't know if it would

have been that big of a deal. But, it happened a week before and wouldn't you know I heard about it from the battalion.

Importance of the System

Responses about the importance of the performance management system were mixed. While some of the employees believed that the system was necessary to maintain paperwork and protocol, others believed that the performance evaluations were nothing more than a game of favoritism. Most of the employee respected the use of the system, but many did not believe that it offered any real value in terms of employee development or improvement of the organization. One respondent noted that "We go through the same process every year and nothing changes." Another stated that "Even if you get a report, it doesn't mean too much. You may not get as big of a raise or you may not get a promotion. It's not like you lose your job."

Changes or Improvements to the System

When asked about what changes or improvements should be made to the current system, a few of the respondents noted that the system should be abolished altogether. These respondents noted that the system did not really differentiate "good" and "bad" performers. With no real means for determining who performed well and who performed poorly, the system should just be changed to provide everyone with the same raise every year. The management employee interviewed for this investigation believed that the system should be changed and improved. However, this employee also acknowledged the challenges and issues that could arise as a result of this process. Changing the system would have significant costs for the organization. Additionally, this interviewee noted that change would be a difficult process for those higher up in the organization. Many of these employees have been with the fire department for more than

20 years. Creating change at this point might receive considerable resistance, making change impossible.

Respondents were also asked about what changes or improvements they would make to the current employee performance measurement system. Responses to this question were not uniform. However, one specific theme did emerge. Most of the respondents wanted to create a system that was fair. The specific methods proposed to achieve this goal were different and numerous. Some respondents argued that the system should be abolished altogether while others argued that the system should be focused on providing evaluations from more than just one person (e.g., the battalion). Even though the recommendations for change were different, the reality is that most of the respondents did want to see a higher degree of fairness in the performance measurement system.

How Changes Would Help

In addition to noting changes and improvements to the system, respondents were also asked to consider how the changes would help to improve employees and the organization. Most of the responses on this issue focused on creating an environment of fairness in which employees were judged based on their performance rather than their relationship with the battalion. Many believed that change in the system would ensure that the right person was promoted for a particular job. Additionally, some of the respondents noted that the changes would reduce the anxiety associated with the process of evaluation. In terms of outcomes for the organization, some of the respondents noted that the organization could benefit by improving its workforce and creating an organization in which employees were productive and motivated.

Description of Culture

With regard to their descriptions of the culture at the fire department, one word was consistently repeated by respondents: “brotherhood.” Most, if not all of the respondents described the culture of the organization as one based on a deep commitment and attachment to their colleagues. While issues such as performance evaluations were important, most believed that the relationships that had been developed with their brothers were the most important element to the overall environment of the organization. One respondent noted this by stating the following:

Yeah, you get mad because you think I should have gotten this and he shouldn't have gotten that. But when you're out there and you have to rely on one another, all of the crap just goes out the window. You realize what's important and you are able to put it all aside. It's us together. We don't have anyone else but each other.

The Importance of Culture

Most of the respondents agreed that the culture of the organization was important. Most argued that there were few other organizations in which such a culture existed. The respondents felt lucky to have their culture and most believe that the culture is essential to their success. Because the members of the organization are able to recognize the importance of brotherhood, they can set aside any problems or issues to protect each other in the line of duty.

Is Change Needed in the Culture?

When asked if change was needed in the culture, most of the respondents stated “no.” Many recognize the importance of the organization's culture to their success and their safety. Additionally many noted that the culture of the organization is what distinguished the

organization from others in the public sector. One respondent noted “You won’t find this anywhere else. It is who we are.”

Negative Effects of Culture

Most of the respondents did not believe that the culture of the organization had a negative impact on outcomes. However, a few of the respondents noted that the culture did create some degree of unprofessionalism among the ranks. For instance, hazing of new employees was still used occasionally. Additionally, if an employee did not fit in, the members of the organization would ban together to shun him or her. These issues create some challenges for cohesion among team members. Further, these issues have been known to create conflict in the organization. Thus, even though most of the respondents were unwilling to talk about these negative issues, there are some drawbacks to the current organizational culture.

Answers to the Research Questions

The first research question posed for this investigation was “What impact will a new performance evaluation system have on outcomes for professionalism in the fire department?” Based on the responses provided by employees, it seems reasonable to argue that the current performance evaluation system does not provide any real supports for fairness or professional development. Given that these issues are important to the success of the organization, it is also reasonable to argue that a new performance evaluation system would provide a stronger foundation for employee development. In addition, a new performance evaluation system may help alleviate anxiety associated with pay raises, as evaluations would be based on a true assessment of individual action and performance.

The second research question posed for this investigation was “How is change undertaken in the fire department?” Based on a review of the data provided with regard to the

culture of the organization it is evident that change is not widely supported in the organization. Traditional practices of management and leadership continue to dominate the organization. Cultural values are preserved by current leaders and change is not widely welcomed. Because of these issues, creating the change needed to improve the current performance evaluation system may pose a significant challenge for the organization.

The third research question posed for this investigation was “What organizational structures and/or variables will impede or facilitate the change process?” Current management and leadership practices and the culture of the organization appear to be the most salient impediments to change and to improving the current employee evaluation system. Culture and values in the organization have become ingrained in both the leadership and management practices used by those in charge. Continued focus on a brotherhood culture makes it difficult for employees to see the value of organizational tools and rules that may improve the performance of both employees and the organization’s operations.

The final research question posed for this investigation was “What improvements can be made to the fire department organization to improve change programs initiated in the future?” Improving the employee performance measurement system is a process which will require a considerable change in culture, leadership and management in the organization. Leaders in the organization must embrace the need for change and provide the support for employees to engage in the change process. Without these supports in place, employees will not have the motivation or capability to change. While demanding change may create the needed response, effective long-term change will require managers and leaders in the organization to understand the need for change and embrace change as a positive component of the organization’s operation and survival.

Discussion/Implications

The results obtained in this investigation demonstrate that the current performance evaluation system that exists at New Smyrna Beach Fire Rescue has many of the problems inherent in employee performance evaluations found in most organizations. Based on the data obtained, the system does not provide enough information to improve employee performance (Chang, 2006), serves as a source of anxiety for employees (Nickols, 2007) and does not provide the organization with pertinent data on how resources are used or objectives are achieved (Maylett & Riboldi, 2007). Because employee performance measurement systems have been shown to have such important benefits for public organizations (Eisenkopf, 2009), improving the system is imperative for augmenting both employee and organizational performance and outcomes.

Although it is evident that the employee performance evaluation system in the organization is not effective, changing the system appears to be a notable challenge. Literature regarding the culture of the fire department organization suggests that this culture is one that is embedded in tradition (Wallace, 2007) and difficult to change (Cook, 2002). The findings of this investigation demonstrate that the New Smyrna Beach Fire Rescue emulates a culture that is commensurate with what is noted in the literature. As such, creating some of the basic foundations for change needed to establish a new employee performance evaluation system represents a notable challenge. Many of the supports needed for change in the organization such as leadership and culture simply are not present to support such a change in the current management practices of the organization.

The implications of these findings are quite significant. At the present time, public agencies including police and fire departments are facing significant pressure to become more accountable and transparent. While fire service is an essential community service, increased

public demand for improvement in these agencies will facilitate the need for change, the need for improving professionalism and the need for careful and precise allocation of resources. If fire departments fail to respond to these external demands and changes, these organizations may not have the continued support of the community. Overall, this indicates that more significant and permanent changes in the culture and operation of the fire department may be needed to meet the demands of the public.

Recommendations

Based on the findings obtained through this research, it seems feasible to recommend that leaders and managers currently working in fire service develop and implement new methods of leadership and management practice that will focus the organization on a rules-based environment. While the brotherhood of the fire department is important for the psychological health and well being of fire department employees, a practical rules-based approach to management and leadership is needed to ensure that fire departments remain fiscally viable over the long-term.

Arguably, the process of moving toward more formal structures and rules for organizational operation will be difficult. However, the development and implementation of a new performance evaluation system which uses best practices from the literature may provide the needed supports to move the fire department organization toward a new culture of leadership and management. Professionals working in the fire department must have a better understanding of the external pressures faced by the organization and must be able to integrate these issues into the context of their work on a daily basis. Improving the employee performance measurement system used in the fire department is one step toward establishing a new culture in the

organization; one that will provide the supports needed for increased productivity and improved performance of the organization.

Appendix A: Interview Questions Used to Guide Focus Group Interviews

1. What is your impression of the employee performance measurement system that we use?
2. What advantages does the system provide?
3. What problems do you see with the system?
4. Do you think that the system is important?
5. What changes or improvements would you make to the system?
6. Do you think that improvements would help employees or the fire department?
7. Describe our culture here at the fire department. What are your impressions?
8. Do you think that culture is important?
9. Do you think that change is needed in our culture?
10. Does our culture negatively affect us or the way the organization operates?

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