Fire Officer Development for the Hagerstown Fire Department

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Certification Statement

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Abstract

The Hagerstown Fire Department has no formal officer development program; fire apparatus operators are promoted to captain with no formal internal training or mentoring. The purpose of this research is to identify methods and procedures that the Hagerstown Fire Department may use to develop fire officer candidates for leadership positions. The descriptive research method was used to identify how the lack of an officer development program has affected the fire department, what methods other organizations use to develop individuals for management and leadership positions, and what programs are available to incorporate into a fire officer development program. Through an internal questionnaire and an extensive literature and program review, the researcher supported the need for a professional development program and identified key components of programs in place elsewhere. The implementation of a comprehensive professional development program was recommended, along with the identification of organizational values as the foundation, and the initiation of a mentoring program to support professional development in the organization.
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Introduction

The first-line supervisor in most organizations serves one of the most critical roles in carrying out the mission of the organization. Often, the first-line supervisory position is considered to be the backbone of the organization, forming and implementing objectives that help to accomplish the goals established by senior leadership, and ensuring that the workforce carries out prescribed tasks. This is true in the fire service and the Hagerstown Fire Department, as our shift captains and battalion chiefs jointly provide first-line leadership to operational personnel. However, personnel are promoted from fire apparatus operator to captain largely based on leadership and management training and experience received outside the realm of the Hagerstown Fire Department. This leads to inconsistencies in decision-making and overall leadership and management of operational personnel.

The problem is that the Hagerstown Fire Department has no formal officer development program; fire apparatus operators are promoted to captain with no formal internal training or mentoring. Job descriptions for officers are reviewed and updated on a regular basis, but there has never been a formal program in place to prepare officer candidates for promotion. Experience and training qualifications for personnel who are promoted are most frequently met by serving as an officer in volunteer fire company outside of the city, and by pursuing individual training outside of the workplace. This leads to inconsistency in training levels, experience, and capabilities of officer candidates. Additionally, management and leadership styles are based on outside experiences that may not conform to the norms established by the Hagerstown Fire Department.
The purpose of this research is to identify methods and procedures that the Hagerstown Fire Department may use to develop fire officer candidates for leadership positions. Methods, procedures, and programs identified in this research can later be used to develop a formal fire officer development program for the Hagerstown Fire Department.

The descriptive research method will be used to identify how the lack of an officer development program has affected the fire department and what fire service and non-fire service programs are available to incorporate into a fire officer development program for the Hagerstown Fire Department. The questions used to guide this research are: (a) what impact has the lack of a formal professional development program had on the Hagerstown Fire Department? (b) what methods do private sector organizations and the military use to develop individuals for management and leadership positions?, and (c) what fire service and non-fire service programs are available for integration into an internal fire officer development program?

Background and Significance

The City of Hagerstown is the county seat of Washington County, Maryland. The 2007 population was 39,640. The daytime population increases to 47,283 people due to commuting workers. The city covers an area of 10.7 square miles and has an average population density of 3,588 people per square mile. There are 17,068 housing units within the city. Housing is predominantly closely situated ordinary and wood frame construction, many of which were built before the implementation of formal fire codes. The city has seen a significant increase in annexation and new construction in the last five to seven years.

The Hagerstown Fire Department is a combination fire department that is predominantly staffed by career personnel supplemented by volunteers, who provide fire suppression, rescue, and emergency medical first-response services to the city. There are six fire stations and an
There are administrative offices that also serve as the shift commander’s quarters. There are 83 career personnel and 10 active volunteers. Personnel operate five engine companies staffed with two personnel, two ladder companies staffed with two personnel, and two support vehicles; one staffed by two career personnel and the second staffed by volunteers. The administrative office consists of the fire chief, deputy fire chief, training captain, and administrative coordinator. The operations division consists of three shifts of 23 unionized firefighters and fire apparatus operators, each led by one battalion chief and one shift captain. Minimum staffing per shift is 15 firefighters and one captain or battalion chief. The fire marshal’s office consists of a chief fire marshal and two deputy fire marshals. The fire prevention division consists of a life safety educator and a public education specialist. The department responds to approximately 2,200 emergency incidents per year.

Personnel are selected for promotion on an as-needed basis. The current system for promotion from fire apparatus operator to captain consists of a written exam, résumé and training review, and oral exam conducted by the three current battalion chiefs, two current captains, and one career fire officer from an outside jurisdiction. An eligibility list is created based on this process, which is used by the fire chief to select a candidate for promotion to shift captain.

There currently is no formal training program for personnel who wish to pursue promotion to captain. Personnel must obtain training on an individual basis. Although minimum training requirements are outlined in fire officer job descriptions, there is no program in place to provide this training internally for fire officer candidates before they are promoted to captain. Experience that is evaluated during the selection process is based largely on experience gained outside of the fire department. This may be as an officer in a volunteer fire company, or in a management position in part-time employment, previous employment, or some other non-fire
service organization or job. Relying solely on outside training and previous experience creates vast differences in types and levels of training and experiences that officer candidates possess. This creates greater issues when personnel are promoted without standardized training that is based on Hagerstown Fire Department policy and guidelines, as supervisors base their leadership and management styles and practices solely on what they have learned outside of the Hagerstown Fire Department.

To this end, the Hagerstown Fire Department has three shifts, each managed differently; essentially three different fire departments with the same name, patch, and mission. This research will identify programs and practices in use in other fields and other fire service jurisdictions that can be incorporated with formal training into a comprehensive professional fire officer development program for the Hagerstown Fire Department. By using this research to aid in the development and implementation of a fire officer development program, many of the same topics addressed in the National Fire Academy’s Executive Development course can be addressed, including organizational culture, change management, ethics, service quality, and leadership. In identifying avenues for professional development, the Hagerstown Fire Department can take steps to make fire officer candidates better prepared for their future leadership positions. This research coincides with the United States Fire Administration’s operational objectives for the National Fire Academy, as it will allow the fire department to address the emerging issue of fire officer development in a timely manner. By providing consistent training for prospective fire officers, it may ultimately lead to the reduction in the potential for firefighter fatalities, as officers will have enhanced decision-making skills that can be used on a daily basis. Providing a regimented officer development program will also help the Hagerstown Fire Department meet one of the sixteen life safety initiatives developed at the
National Fallen Firefighters Life Safety Summit in 2004 by developing a program that implements national standards for training, qualifications, and certification (including regular recertification) that are equally applicable to all firefighters based on the duties they are expected to perform.

Literature Review

This research will identify the need for and implementation options for a fire officer development program for the Hagerstown Fire Department. At the center of this concept is the critical need for effective leadership (National Interagency Fire Center, 2008). Unfortunately, aspiring leaders with a broad range of skills in leadership as well as management are sometimes difficult to find (Pernick, 2002). The first line supervisor is one of the most important positions in any organization, especially the fire service. In his series of articles titled Captain’s College, Hatfield (2008) identifies states that “No matter what the title, captain, lieutenant, or officer in charge, the position of supervisor is the backbone of all fire service delivery.”

When an officer candidate is selected for promotion, they are selected with the faith and trust that they possess the abilities to lead their subordinates (Hawkins, 2000). To some people, leadership and fire ground command come naturally. Others struggle with these concepts for their entire career, and some simply require time to develop their skills (Sagar, 2005). As Booth (1999) states,

“Unfortunately, the candidates are usually placed into positions with little or no relevant training or experience, while some departments provide candidates with a brief orientation class, most individuals are simply thrown into the deep end of the promotional pool, with the vague hope that more will swim than sink.”
At some point, a fire chief may question an officer’s ability based on poor performance (Hawkins, 2000). These issues can be avoided with the implementation of a professional development program, which can have a direct, positive impact on performance of leaders within the organization (Cramb & Memory, 2006).

The fire service has a rich history of developing firefighters on the job by passing technical skills and tricks of the trade down from one generation to the next (Culp, 2008). But this traditional way of learning one’s technical specialty, then somehow making the transition into supervision is not a reliable method for producing adequately trained leadership and management personnel (Pernick, 2002). Failing to properly prepare employees through professional development programs places the organization in a reactive position when seeking qualified personnel for promotion into leadership and management (Culp, 2008). Shouldis (2005) states “having a scheduled supervisor training program can no longer be viewed as a luxury or a mere formality. It is necessary to enhance operational readiness and improve personnel safety.” Fire service and non-fire service professionals agree that formal professional development is a necessity and providing such programs will help to ensure the fulfillment of the organization’s mission as well as promoting the safety of fire service personnel.

Hayes (2008) states, “leadership development is inextricably wed to training and education.” But leadership development does not just happen. Most organizations need a regimented program to guide the improvement of the skills and abilities of their leaders (Pernick, 2002). The first step in developing the future leaders of a fire service organization is to establish a realistic, comprehensive action plan that addresses components for the development of each individual’s skills (Sager, 2005). Sagar (2005) also identifies training courses, previewing pre-
plans, mentoring, simulating, and doubling up as components that should be considered in a professional development program.

Professional development programs should be properly planned, developed, implemented, and regularly evaluated to ensure success. Cramb & Memory (2006) identify three key factors in making professional development plans relevant. They are focusing on outcomes, addressing work challenges, and monitoring development. They state that in professional development programs, organizations should “focus development on enabling people to deliver the required outcomes...development must contribute to business, team, and professional performance” (Cramb & Memory, 2006). Professional development programs should address work challenges faced by employees. This will show immediate results by helping employees do their jobs more effectively based on the training they receive. This will also justify the cost effectiveness of the program. Seeking feedback from participants and supervisors is also a good way to ensure program effectiveness (Cramb & Memory, 2006). Paddock (1997) agrees that professional development must be “meticulously developed, tested, and evaluated.” Paddock states that benchmarking is one way to ensure that management training programs meet expectations. In her article Administrative Benchmarks (1997) Paddock identifies the following benchmark areas for management training programs: oversight and leadership, multiple linkages to other training programs and to professional organizations, stability of financial support, effective program promotion, a consistent management philosophy, administrative control, support of participants, and ongoing program evaluation. These benchmarks can be used in a matrix to develop and evaluate a management training or professional development programs. Pernick (2002) identifies nine steps to the development of an internal professional development program: identifying selection criteria, defining competencies, establishing an application
process, assessing current skills, providing developmental activities, aligning organizational structures to reinforce the program, developing leaders in context, planning for the next generation of leaders, and evaluating the program. The Wildfire Leadership Development Program (National Interagency Fire Center, 2008) identifies three critical components of a professional development program. They are a formal curriculum path that provides leadership skills and training at all stages of an individual’s career, a value set that supports principle-centered leadership actions in a high-risk work environment, and non-traditional leadership development opportunities that allow individuals to strive for a higher performance level as a leader through self-directed continuing education. Regardless of the organization, professional development needs to be properly planned. Based on the information cited, it is important for an organization to properly plan and evaluate professional development initiatives to ensure that they remain effective and beneficial to the organization.

Two key aspects of professional development programs that many view as important are the concept of basing the program on organizational values and implementing a mentoring component as part of the overall program. Mavrinac (2005) states that values answer the question: “How do we act, consistent with our mission, along the path toward achieving our vision?” She also notes that values help to solve ethical problems and can be used as a guide to decision-making, all of which are critical in organizational leadership. Admiral Thad W. Allen, Commandant of the United States Coast Guard, refers to values in his Leadership Development Policy Statement (n.d.), stating that “As an enduring multi-mission organization, the Coast Guard has developed a culture of individual initiative that stresses leadership, teamwork and innovative thinking which is founded upon the character of people who live our core values.”
Allen’s policy statement further supports professional development as a command priority at all levels of the organization. Every supervisor is responsible for providing and supporting leadership development within the organization, as it is an essential element in the Coast Guard’s mission (Allen, n.d.). In their article titled *Professional Learning: New Strategies*, which outlined professional development in education, Gonzales & Vodicka (2008) also agree that the professional development process should begin by referencing the mission, values, and goals of the organization. Identifying values as the foundation for professional development places the focus on the organization’s mission and vision. This helps to ensure that the final outcomes of the program meet the organization’s needs, making value identification one of the most critical aspects of the process.

The second noteworthy aspect of professional development is the use of mentoring in developing future leaders in the fire service. Schrage (2007) agrees that senior firefighters pass on information to the upcoming generation, regardless of the existence of a formal development process. However, Schrage notes that higher turnover rates in some fire departments may prevent this knowledge from being effectively passed on to the next generation. Pernick (2002) also agrees that mentoring is highly valued in public management. Gonzalez & Vodicka (2008) discuss the benefits of mentoring in the teaching field, stating that when teachers and administrators participate in peer mentoring, new skills are learned and implemented in the organization. Working under a tenured mentor in the educational field is not a new concept (Hall, 2008). Most teachers worked through a university-sanctioned student teaching program under an experienced teacher. However, the process is not always continued when teachers are promoted to administration, and “sometimes new principals have to go it alone” (Hall, 2008). Mavrinc (2005) also includes mentoring as part of professional and leadership development,
stating that mentoring helps to enhance relationships and can build a sense of community within an organization. Just as there must be a plan which establishes benchmarks in professional development, mentor programs must also be well planned with established benchmarks to outline progress (Hall, 2008).

By implementing their own professional development programs, organizations get to groom the next generation in line with their culture and strategic agenda (Pernick, 2002). This benefits the organization since the next generation is cultivated from within and organizational values can become ingrained in the leadership. The disadvantages of not developing from within are a likely decrease in morale by those passed over and temporary drops in productivity while new leaders become acclimated to the system (Pernick, 2002).

Based on the literature reviewed organizational values should be the foundation for professional development because they place the focus on the organization’s mission and vision. Mentoring should be included to preserve and pass on veteran knowledge, ideals, and values of the organization to the next generation. Also, professional development programs should be properly planned, developed, implemented, and evaluated to ensure that they remain effective and beneficial to the organization.

Procedures

The descriptive method was used for this research. To obtain information on the research questions, the researcher used a combination of a survey and an extensive literature review. For the first research question, what impact has the lack of a formal professional development program had on the Hagerstown Fire Department?, a survey of current and retired uniformed personnel was conducted. The written survey (see Appendix) consisted of three open-ended questions regarding the current fire officer development practices in the Hagerstown Fire
Two individuals from four categories were randomly selected to participate in the survey. The four categories were retired fire officers, current command officers, prospective fire officers, and tenured firefighters with more than 20 years experience in the Hagerstown Fire Department. Each group was represented equally in the survey. Two current staff officers were selected from the five personnel who are current officers. Two retired officers were selected from the pool of five living retired command officers. Two prospective fire officers were selected randomly from a pool of six personnel who applied for the most recent promotional exam to captain. There are twelve individuals who have more than twenty years experience in the Hagerstown Fire Department. Two personnel were randomly selected from this group as well. The total population of the department is 84 personnel.

The second research question asked what methods do private sector organizations and the military use to develop individuals for management and leadership positions? To answer this question, the researcher conducted an extensive literature review of military and private industry research papers, peer-reviewed articles, and organizational websites pertaining to components of professional development programs, and program implementation. The literature was researched through a number of electronic databases and sources. Hard copies were obtained through the local library and inter-library loan.

The third research question asked what fire service and non-fire service programs are available for integration into an internal fire officer development program? An extensive literature review was conducted to answer this question as well. Previous executive fire officer applied research papers were obtained through the Learning Resource Center at the National Fire Academy. Additionally, articles from educational journals and fire service trade magazines were reviewed. Individual articles that highlighted best practices in fire departments from across the
nation were reviewed to identify what other fire departments were implementing for their professional development programs. Fire Departments that were highlighted in these articles were the Philadelphia (PA) Fire Department, Houston (TX) Fire Department, Alexandria (VA) Fire Department, Prince William County (VA) Department of Fire & Rescue Services, Chesterfield County (VA) Fire and EMS, and the Massachusetts Firefighting Academy.

Results

What impact has the lack of a formal professional development program had on the Hagerstown Fire Department? To answer this question, a three part questionnaire (see Appendix) was distributed to current and retired officers, tenured firefighters, and firefighters aspiring to be officers in the Hagerstown Fire Department. The sample group was small, but provided an accurate depiction of the organization, as each represented about 30 percent of their respective group. This questionnaire provided qualitative results that can be used to support the need for a professional development program, and identify components based on information provided by personnel familiar with the department.

The first question asked what formal education and training did the respondent believe are necessary to effectively function as a staff officer in the Hagerstown Fire Department. Each respondent noted that a minimum of an associate’s degree from an accredited college or university should be the minimum formal education for those who are promoted from fire apparatus operator to captain. Two respondents noted that a bachelor’s degree would be preferred. In addition to formal education, four respondents cited the need for certification to the fire officer II level for captain, and fire officer III for battalion chief. One respondent stated that preference should be given to personnel holding or seeking executive fire officer, certified fire protection Specialist, or chief fire officer designations. Three of the eight individuals separately
noted the need for training in the following areas: personnel management, fire ground command, standard operating guidelines. One individual noted that annual continuing education should be required for officers.

The second question asked if the lack of a formal officer development program has had any negative impact on the Hagerstown Fire Department. If respondents answered yes, they were asked to offer examples. Twenty-five percent of respondents did not think that the lack of a formal officer development program had an effect on the fire department. One noted that “we have been lucky to promote good officers.” Another noted that we have promoted individuals who have taken the initiative to receive training on their own however, in the very near future this may not work.

Seventy-five percent of respondents stated that the lack of a formal officer development program did have a negative impact on the department. Three provided comments on how the organization has been negatively impacted by the lack of an officer development program, including:

- “It has slowed down officer development. Personnel must get training on their own.”
- “We have failed to develop personnel. Those who are promoted may not be ready.”
- “There is no management support for such a program.”

Two respondents who agreed that the lack of a program had a negative impact provided positive feedback in support of a program with their answer, one stating that such a program would develop teamwork and enhance fire ground management, and the other stating that such a program may motivate more personnel to apply for promotion.

The third question asked if the respondent believed that an internal officer development program would be beneficial to officer candidates and the department as a whole. All eight
respondents unanimously answered yes. Six respondents provided additional comments to support their answer, stating that an officer development program would build confidence, assist in career development, and provide candidates with a greater understanding of officer expectations. Others noted that such a program could allow for “acting officer” positions to provide experience, a program would allow and promote mentoring by senior officers, and would create a career path of those who aspire to be promoted. One respondent emphasized that an officer development program is “quickly becoming a necessity.”

Just as noted in the questionnaire results from Hagerstown, other fire departments have had similar issues with promoting without professional development oversight. Connealy (2000) states,

“In the past, the department had been guilty of promoting unprepared members into the officer ranks. For example, an engineer/operator might have been promoted to the rank of captain without a formal transition period. This was wrong, as there is a tremendous difference from being a member of a crew one day and being in charge of it the next. This supervisory role doesn’t lend itself to success by simply reading a management book following a promotional exam.”

What methods do private sector organizations and the military use to develop individuals for management and leadership positions? Abbott Laboratories, a global healthcare company, provides a comprehensive professional development program for its employees. Abbott is a “broad-based, global health care company devoted to discovering new medicines, new technologies, and new ways to manage health” and was recently rated one of the top “50 Best Places to Launch a Career” by Business Week magazine (Abbott Laboratories, 2008). The company offers an internal professional development program to prepare participants for future
key leadership positions within the organization. Mentoring by leaders from within the organization is a fundamental part of their program (Abbott Laboratories, 2008). The Abbott professional development program offers courses for participants in focused areas such as engineering, finance and accounting, information technology, quality assurance, and management development. In addition, the program requires rotation of work assignments in different geographic locations and operational divisions. The professional programs are “highly selective two-three year assignments and rotation based programs build around formal learning and mentoring” and during this period, participants are assigned an experienced leader to act as a mentor to support individual professional development (Abbott Laboratories, 2008).

The AT&T Corporation also provides a comprehensive leadership development program that includes rotating work assignments across the organization to develop recruited graduate students and indoctrinate them into the organizations leadership pool. In this program, participants are placed in three different work assignments, including management positions, over a 24-28 month period (American Telephone & Telegraph Corporation, n.d.). In addition to the rotating work assignments, participants are provided regular workshop training in the areas of business strategy, finance, and leadership. In addition, participants are assigned a peer mentor who is available to provide guidance and support to the participant throughout the program (American Telephone & Telegraph Corporation, n.d.).

The Coast Guard has three levels of leadership development resource initiatives for its personnel, outlined by Admiral Thad Allen, in the U.S. Coast Guard Commandant’s Leadership Development Policy. At the organizational level, the Leadership Development Framework outlines competencies and training for each level of leadership within the Coast Guard. Teamwork and leader development in every unit, as part of the greater organization, is the
emphasis of the *Unit Leadership Development Program*. The *Individual Development Plan* encourages each member’s professional development as part of their service (United States Coast Guard, n.d.). The Coast Guard places great emphasis on core values of honor, respect, and devotion to duty as the foundation for its leadership and professional development program.

“These core values are more than just Coast Guard rules for behavior. They are deeply rooted in the heritage that has made our organization great. They demonstrate who we are and guide our performance, conduct, and decisions every minute of every day. Because we each represent the Coast Guard to the public, we must all embrace these values in our professional undertakings as well as in our personal lives” (USCG, 2007).

The United States Coast Guard provides a comprehensive leadership development program for its enlisted, commissioned, and civilian personnel. Components of the program include the Individual Development Plan, a mentoring program, Tuition Assistance, and a Coast Guard Reading List (USCG, 2007). The Enlisted Professional Military Education provides the foundation for the enlisted person’s successful career. This self-study program includes performance requirements and an end-of-course test that assist in the completion of the program. Individual Development Plans are personally tailored that outlines training and experience expectations, and allows the individual and the supervisor to identify short and long-term career goals. The IDP “outlines the training and developmental experiences to achieve those goals, for the benefit of the individual, unit, and Coast Guard” (USCG, n.d.).

The Coast Guard also places significant focus on mentoring as part of the leadership development program. Mentees are paired with mentors two grade levels higher and outside their chain of command (USCG, 2007). This program provides personal support from the mentor throughout the individual’s career in the Coast Guard (USCG, 2007).
The United States Drug Enforcement Agency requires mandatory internal training and continuing education for its supervisors. After promotion, new first-line supervisors are required to attend the three-week Groups Supervisor Institute (United States Drug Enforcement Association [DEA], n.d.). With twenty-four to thirty-six months following the Group Supervisor Institute, supervisors must attend a week-long supervisor’s in-service program, which includes a section on professional development (DEA, n.d.).

The Civil Air Patrol, an official auxiliary of the United States Air Force, has an extensive Senior Member Professional Development program. This program guides Civil Air Patrol leaders through the professional development process. There are five consecutive levels of the program; orientation, technical training, management, command and staff, and executive (Civil Air Patrol, 2003). Each level requires completion of various independent study and/or resident educational programs, in addition to the requirements of the previous level. Each level also includes recognition awards for the successful completion of the specific level. Completion of each level, coupled with time-in-grade satisfies requirements for promotion at various ranks (Civil Air Patrol, 2003).

What fire service and non-fire service programs are available for integration into an internal fire officer development program? According to Shouldis (2005) the Philadelphia (PA) Fire Department divides their professional development program into two phases, the pre-promotion phase, which requires the completion of a college-level fire science program, and post-promotion phase, that requires the completion of an 80-hour in-house professional development course. Areas of focus in the post-promotion course include management, prevention, operations, safety, and fire cause investigation (Shouldis, 2005).
The Houston (TX) Fire Department has a 40-hour officer development program for newly appointed officers four times per year (Connealy, 2000). Additionally, they provide sixteen hours of continuing education for each fire officer. Support division and civilian managers are included in these professional development programs as well because as Connealy (2000) notes “the future of our department depends on all of our managers maximizing the performance of personnel and their resources. The HFD professional development classes focus on a significant number of topics, including the development of organizational values and their impact on the department (Connealy, 2000).

The Alexandria (VA) Fire Department has created the Leadership, Education, and Development Institute to provide comprehensive leadership training for all department managers (Hawkins, 2000). All appointed officers, supervisors, and managers from support divisions are required to attend the four-phase program. Phase one focuses on the mission and values of the fire department and self-directed professional growth. Phase two focuses on management skills for all successful managers, including communications, team building and leadership, time management, and conflict management. Phase three focuses on legal aspects and employee evaluations. Phase four focuses on strategy and tactics, customer service, financial management, and the fire department’s role as part of local government (Hawkins, 2000).

The Prince William County (VA) Fire Department of Fire & Rescue uses succession planning to develop personnel for future assignments and skill enhancement in their current positions (Culp, 2008). The program also includes career path identification, mentoring, coaching, developmental activities within the organization, executive development courses, position or skill-specific courses, and university-based education (Culp, 2008). Mentors are used
for long term professional development. Mentors help employees to develop complex thinking about plans, techniques, and solutions to problems encountered (Culp, 2008).

The Chesterfield County (VA) Fire and Emergency Medical Services utilized a systematic leadership development program that begins with entry-level firefighter training and extends to the fire chief’s position (Avsec, 2006). Firefighters in recruit school are introduced to leadership through the appointment of crew and class leaders. Firefighters who wish to promote to lieutenant must complete Officer Development I, which meets the NFPA 1021 standards for Fire Officer I, and lieutenants aspiring to the position of captain must complete Officer Development II, which meets the NFPA 1021 requirements for Fire Officer II. Captains who wish to promote to battalion chief must complete a bachelor-level degree program (Avsec, 2006). A First-Line Supervisor’s and Chief Officer’s Schools are conducted annually as in-service training programs for current supervisors. Additionally, the department utilizes leadership development programs offered by the Darden Graduate School of Business administration at the University of Virginia (Avsec, 2006).

The Massachusetts Firefighting Academy, in conjunction with the University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute, has offered Chief Fire Officer training since 1990 (Pierce, 2008). The program was overhauled in 2007 and increased from 11 to 13 days to meet full compliance with the NFPA 1021 standards for Fire Officer III and Fire Officer IV. The course followed topics mapped out in the International Association of Fire Chiefs Officer Development Handbook and also met the requirements established by the Fire and Emergency Services Higher Education [FESHE] model for professional development (Pierce, 2008). Pierce (2008) credits input from fire service and outside programs as part of their success, stating “our partnership with the University of Massachusetts has been outstanding over the years.”
The Fire and Emergency Services Higher Education network is an organization of colleges and universities working to standardize fire service curriculum throughout the United States, and promote the fire service as a profession (National Fallen Firefighter’s Foundation, 2007). Through annual conferences, FESHE members have developed a *National Professional Development Model* matrix, which outlines fire service training and education, the goal of which is to enhance fire and emergency services as a profession and reduce the loss of life, both civilian and fire service, and property (Federal Emergency Management Agency [FEMA], n.d.) FESHE has developed three professional development strategic goals while working the professional development community to produce:

1) a national model for an integrated, competency based system of fire and emergency services professional development,

2) a national model for a system for higher education for fire and emergency services from associate’s degrees to doctoral degrees,

3) well trained and academically-educated fire and emergency services preparing the nation for all-hazards responses (FEMA, n.d.)

FESHE also promotes the Degrees at a Distance Program. These self study programs are attractive to fire service personnel due to their rotating schedules that prevent attendance of regular classes.

In 2003, the International Association of Fire Chiefs [IAFC] published the first edition of the *Officer Development Handbook*. In this text, the IAFC (2003) states “professional development is the planned, progressive, life long process of education, training, self-development, and experience.” The four key elements of professional development are identified as education, training, experience, and self development. The IAFC builds upon the
FESHE models of training and education, buy further breaking down the levels and requirements of education, training, experience, and self development for fire officer development. The IAFC (2003) identifies the four consecutive levels of fire officer development; the supervising fire officer, the managing fire officer, the administrative fire officer, and the executive fire officer, and identifies education requirements based on job performance outcomes for each officer level.

Several colleges and universities provide professional development programs that public and private sector organizations can utilize for the enhancement of their personnel and their organization. Rutgers University in New Jersey has developed a comprehensive organizational and individual professional development program that can be used by virtually any organization. Areas of focus include an organizational assessment to identify strengths and improvement opportunities, leadership and strategic planning, work process improvement, staff workplace culture, and excellence measures and outcomes (Rutgers, 2007). North Carolina State University offers a similar university based program that focuses on professional development law enforcement officers. The twelve-week Administrative Officers Management Program that couples the “theoretical perspective of the faculty with the practical experience of the officers” provides continuing education for, and facilitates networking between, students who participate in the program (North Carolina State University, 2008). The Wharton Leadership Center at the University of Pennsylvania is an educational and research center focusing on leadership and change management (University of Pennsylvania, n.d.). As part of this program, Wharton Leadership Ventures has developed the U.S. Marine Corps. Program, a physically and mentally challenging program that emphasizes fast decision-making, effective strategic thinking, and team building (University of Pennsylvania, n.d.). Harris Leadership Development provides corporate training programs, consulting, and seminars designed to enhance organizational and leadership
development. Professional development topics include personal responsibility, clear communications, excellence in customer service, and effective time management (Harris Leadership Development, 2008).

Discussion

In order to determine the need for a professional development program, one does not have to look outside their organization. Results of the internal questionnaire conducted in the Hagerstown Fire Department showed significant need for a professional development program, as seventy-five percent agreed that the lack of such a program has had a negative impact on the department. Other departments that were reviewed in the research also noted similar issues with their promotional processes as well. To this point, the Hagerstown Fire Department has fallen into the same mindset described by Hawkins (2000) who states that there is the belief that if you earned the gold, you’ll be successful as a manager. Questionnaire comments such as “those who are promoted may not be ready” support this concept. Pernick (2002) also agrees that the way personnel are trained to perform technically is not an effective way to train and prepare leadership.

Another question posed to Hagerstown Fire Department personnel asked if an internal professional development program would benefit the department. A significant, one hundred percent positive response significantly indicates that a program is needed in the department. One responded noted the “it is quickly becoming necessary.” Shouldis (2005) also supports the idea that supervisor training is no longer a “luxury” but a necessity for a successful fire service organization. Questionnaire respondents also provided feedback that a professional development program would build confidence, assist in career development, and provide an understanding of officer expectations prior to promotion. A professional development program could help
potential officers to identify if promotion is right for them. Cramb & Memory (2006) note “professional development has a direct, positive impact on recruitment, performance, and retention.” Thus, a professional development program will groom future officers and enhance performance of those currently in leadership positions.

A number of professional development programs and program components were identified through this research. Of the six fire service organizations reviewed, all utilized an internally developed program. Pernick (2002) notes the importance of having an internal program, as it allows organizations to develop and groom their next generation with the organizations own culture and agenda.

Most of the professional development programs reviewed, fire service, military, and private sector, identified the need for professional development to encompass the entire organization, not just the transition from firefighter or employee into leadership and management. Chesterfield County Virginia Fire and EMS, Prince William County, Virginia Department of Fire and Emergency Service, AT&T, the United States Coast Guard, and the Civil Air Patrol have all implemented professional development programs that span from the entry level to the top position in the organization’s leadership. Abbott Laboratories, AT&T, and Prince William County Department of Fire & Emergency Services all include job rotations as part of their professional development programs. Ensuring that the program is realistic (Sager, 2005), properly planned (Cramb & Memory, 2006), and evaluated for effectiveness (Paddock, 1997) are important aspects in professional development program implementation.

Two key themes were found in this research regarding professional development programs and their components. The first is the idea that the root of the professional development program should be based on organizational values. Admiral Allen of the United
States Coast Guard cites that values answer the moral, intellectual, and philosophical questions as to how we work toward the mission, consistent with the vision of the organization. The Coast Guard identifies three core values as honor, respect, and devotion to duty and makes them the foundation for their professional development program (USCG, 2007). Gonzales & Vodicka (2008) also cite values as the basis for professional development in an organization. The Alexandria (VA) Fire Department dedicates an entire phase of its Leadership, Education, and Development Institute to the mission and values of the fire department (Hawkins, 2000). The Houston (TX) Fire Department also focuses its professional development program on organizational values and their impact on their own organization (Connealy, 2000). Identifying organizational values provides the Hagerstown Fire Department with a focal point to begin development of an internal professional development program.

The second key component of most professional development programs that were reviewed was the implementation of some type of mentoring program. Organizations in the private sector, military, and the fire service use mentoring as part of their professional development programs. Abbott Laboratories (2008) assigns experienced leaders to individuals participating in their professional development programs. These leaders mentor participants and support their professional development. The United States Coast Guard (2007) assigns mentors from different ranks and outside of the mentee’s immediate chain of command. This provides a unique opportunity for the mentee to work with a mentor who may provide a different perspective on job and career challenges. Mentors are assigned in the Prince William County (VA) Department of Fire & Rescue to promote long-term professional development and inspire complex thinking and problem solving (Culp, 2008). Regardless of the application, mentoring should be formalized by having a plan and benchmarks for performance, as Hall (2008)
describes in its application in the educational field. A mentoring program provides one-on-one professional development guidance for the mentee, and promotes joint learning and growth in leadership between the mentee and mentor. Mavrinic (2005) notes that mentoring strengthens relationships and builds a sense of community. In an organization like the Hagerstown Fire Department with strained labor-management relations, mentoring could be a tool used to help bridge the gap between labor and management by fostering leadership and growth in understanding across the rank structure. Mentoring also promotes the passing of knowledge from one generation to the next, as Pernick (2002) notes “we groom the next generation.” The fire service is rich in tradition. Many firefighters pass down technical tricks of the trade from one generation to the next. The same concept can be applied for leadership and professional development through a formal mentoring program.

Many colleges and universities offer leadership development programs for public and private organizations, such as those offered by Rutgers University and the Wharton Leadership Center at the University of Pennsylvania. These programs are offered in various formats, and organizations can chose who will attend specific programs. These programs address leadership from the broad perspective, whereas program like the Administrative Officers Management Program at North Carolina State University focuses on leadership and management related to the specific service; in this case, law enforcement. Private organizations Harris Leadership Development also provide leadership training and professional development form the broad perspective. These outside perspectives are beneficial to the fire service, but are limited because they may not address specific fire service related challenges and issues that fire service professionals may encounter. The Massachusetts Firefighting Academy and Chesterfield County (VA) Fire and EMS take a unique approach by developing partnerships with institutions of
higher learning to assist with professional development. Chesterfield County utilizes programs offered by the Darden Graduates School of Business from the University of Virginia (Avsec, 2006). The Massachusetts Firefighting Academy developed a partnership with the University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute to implement its Chief Fire Officer Program (Pierce, 2008). Implementing joint programs allowed for the integration of theories, concepts and ideas from institutions of higher learning while retaining fire service oversight to the programs, allowing for custom education for fire service professionals.

The Fire and Emergency Services Higher Education conferences and the International Association of Fire Chiefs have laid the groundwork that can become the foundation of any fire officer professional development program. By coupling the National Professional Development Model Matrix (FEMA, n.d.) developed by FESHE which outlines training and education, and the four levels of fire officer development established by the International Association of Fire Chiefs in the Officer Development Handbook, the Hagerstown Fire Department can build an internal professional development program for each fire officer rank. This will not only ensure that personnel in each position meet nationally accepted training and education requirements based on expected job performance outcomes, but it will provide a guide for personnel to pursue higher education and training, congruent with their job and career path.

Recommendations

The problem is that the Hagerstown Fire Department has no formal officer development program; Fire Apparatus Operators are promoted to captain with no formal internal training or mentoring. The purpose of this research is to identify methods and procedures that the Hagerstown Fire Department may use to develop fire officer candidates for leadership positions. Based on literature research and an internal questionnaire of past, present, and potential officers,
along with tenured firefighters in the fire department, it has been determined that an internal professional development program is necessary for the Hagerstown Fire Department. This research identified key components for the establishment of a professional development program however, more research would be required develop a fine-tuned, comprehensive program to fit the organization.

The first step in the development of the professional development program for the Hagerstown Fire Department is the establishment of core values for the fire department. Although the City of Hagerstown and the Hagerstown Fire Department are both guided by mission and vision statements, the establishment of core values for the fire department will provide the basis for the means of completing the mission and achieving the vision. Results from the research specifically noted the need for established core values as the foundation for professional development throughout the organization.

Results from the literature research also placed a strong focus on the use of mentoring in the professional development process. As part of the professional development program, mentoring would support the passing of knowledge on a one-on-one basis. This pairing of the mentor and the mentee can also strengthen working relationships within the organization within and across labor/management barriers. By implementing a mentoring program as part of the organization’s overall professional development, the Hagerstown Fire Department will nurture and grow its own leaders to carry on organizational strategies, traditions, and values.

This research also determined that a professional development program should not only be focused on fire officer development, but should span the entire organizational structure, from firefighter to fire chief, including administrative and support staff. This professional development program should be based on fire department job descriptions, nationally accepted
standards and practices, such as those outlined in the *Officer Development Handbook*, and the *National Professional Development Model* matrix developed by FESHE.

By using an internal questionnaire, the researcher was able to conduct qualitative research to determine the expectations of the organization regarding the need for and desired components of a professional development program. This can be used to not only describe what aspects of a program are desired and needed, but could also be used in action research to further identify specific components that could be part of an internal professional development program for any fire department. There was difficulty and analysis and comparison of professional development programs bases on literature review. When conducting literature research on individual professional development programs, future researchers should be cautioned to avoid focusing on specific components of individual programs. Each organization is unique, thus professional development programs are also unique to the organization based on its structure, operations, and needs; there were many options to review. However, this method was successful in determining broader ideals and areas of focus to begin development of a comprehensive professional development program for a fire department. Further action research is required to determine specific components of, establish and implementation plan for, determine a means for evaluation of a comprehensive professional development program for the Hagerstown Fire Department.
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Officer Development Questionnaire

I am conducting a questionnaire as part of my National Fire Academy, Executive Fire Officer applied research project; Officer Development in the Hagerstown Fire Department. As a member of our department, your input is critical in determining the need for and components of a formal fire officer development program.

Please complete the following three questions as completely as possible. Thank you for your assistance and input.

1. What formal education and training do you believe are necessary to effectively function as a staff officer in the Hagerstown Fire Department?

2. In your opinion, has the lack of a formal officer development program had any negative impact on the Hagerstown Fire Department? If so, please offer examples.

3. Do you believe an internal officer development program would be beneficial to officer candidates and the department as a whole?