PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR OFFICERS IN THE PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF FIRE AND RESCUE

EXECUTIVE DEVELOPMENT

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An applied research project submitted to the National Fire Academy as part of the Executive Officer Program

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

The problem was that the Prince William County Department of Fire and Rescue did not have a model professional development program for officers. This lack of organizational direction has left the interpretation and decision making of what knowledge, skills and abilities are critical for current and future leaders of the Department to the individual who aspires to become an officer within the department.

The purpose of this research project was to identify the current professional development practice for officers, the organizational expectations for officers within the Prince William County Department of Fire and Rescue and recommend an approach to professional development for those aspiring to be an officer.

The descriptive research methodology was used to answer the following research questions in an attempt to recommend an approach to professional development within Prince William County.

1. What are the typical components of professional development program in fire departments and the private sector?
2. What components are presently offered for officers at Prince William County Department of Fire and Rescue?
3. What are the organizational expectations of the employee?
4. What elements of professional development should be included in a Prince William County Department of Fire and Rescue program?
The procedures used were a review of applicable literature and a request of current practices from surrounding jurisdictions. Job descriptions, evaluation forms, and current policies of the Prince William County Department of Fire and Rescue were used to determine current practice. Chief officers were interviewed as well as National Fire Academy staff. These interviews assisted in identifying and clarifying current practice and future direction of professional development.

Recommendations were made to form a committee to initiate change concerning the professional development program in the Prince William County Department of Fire and Rescue with an expected timeframe of five years.
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INTRODUCTION

The problem is that the Prince William County Department of Fire and Rescue does not have a model professional development program for officers. This lack of organizational direction has left the interpretation and decision making of what knowledge, skills and abilities are critical for current and future leaders of the department to the individual who aspires to become an officer. It has also lead to the organization acceptance of a core skill set that may not be compatible with the demands of the organization. “We, as responsible fire service managers, have to take a proactive role in preparing our people for these diverse and increasingly complex challenges of the fire service today.” (Ott 2000) This includes setting the foundation of what is important for prospective candidates, current and future leaders of the Prince William County Department of Fire and Rescue.

The purpose of this research project is to identify the current professional development practice for officers, the organizational expectations for officers within the Prince William County Department of Fire and Rescue and recommend an approach to professional development for those aspiring to be an officer.

The descriptive research methodology was used to answer the following research questions in an attempt to recommend an approach to professional development within Prince William County.
1. What are the typical components of professional development program in fire departments and the private sector?

2. What components are presently offered for officers at Prince William County Department of Fire and Rescue?

3. What are the organizational expectations of the employee?

4. What elements of professional development should be included in a Prince William County Department of Fire and Rescue program?

**BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE**

The Prince William County Department of Fire and Rescue, hereafter referred to as the Department is a metro-size department serving a population of approximately 317,009 as of December 15, 2002 and is expected to increase to 328,400 by 2005 (Prince William County 2002). The Department is a combination department with 299 career uniform and civilian personnel and 847 volunteers from 12 independent departments. The Prince William County Department of Fire and Rescue provides program based services to citizens and visitors to Prince William County that include:

- **Office of the Chief** – Provides leadership and management oversight for the fire and rescue system to include, volunteer association support, planning and analysis, health and safety and public information.

- **Operations** – Provides emergency fire and rescue response including providing basic and advance life support, fire prevention activities through safety inspections of all businesses in Prince William County and public education activities.
• Disaster and Hazardous Materials Preparedness – Provides response to and training for hazardous materials incidents and conducts inspections for extremely hazardous substance facilities in the County.

• Fire Marshal’s Office – Provides code enforcement and inspection-related activities, fire and explosion investigation and building plans review.

• Training and Personnel – Provides training and support services for career and volunteer personnel, breathing apparatus repair, hiring and promotional processes, grievance and disciplinary actions.

• Community Education – Provides safety and injury prevention education on topics including smoke detectors, home fire safety, proper use of 911, self-help first aid and CPR. Develops partnerships including SAFE Kids Coalition and the Community Risk Reduction Committee.

The program areas are based upon defined goals and objectives that support the strategic goals of Prince William County. The management of the fire and rescue system is the responsibility of the Fire and Rescue Association. The Association is comprised of the chief from each of the twelve volunteer departments, the Department of Fire and Rescue’s senior division chief, a firefighter and the chief of the Department of Fire and Rescue who is the chairperson.

The Department is a part of a county government that has recently adopted a vision statement that includes, Prince William County Government is an organization where elected leaders, staff and citizens work together to make our community the best. We, as employees, pledge to do the right thing for the customer and community every time. We, as a learning organization, commit to
provide the necessary support and opportunities for each employee to honor this pledge.

“Most firefighters and officers have earned college credits and training certificates since their first day in the fire service. However, this professional development is usually uncoordinated and fragmented, resulting in duplications of effort and inefficiencies for students. Lack of coordination between fire-related training, higher education, and certification contributes to this problem.” (United States Fire Administration 2002)

The organizational structure of the Department has officers at designated ranks of lieutenant, captain, battalion chief, division chief and chief. The Department has an officer(s) overseeing each division or specialty area with the exception of management services. The Department also embraces the philosophy that all persons of equal rank have the opportunity based upon individual desire or organizational need to fill any position within the department within the rank level obtained. (APPENDIX A)

The base knowledge, skills and abilities (KSA’s) requirements to perform effectively as an officer in a fire station may be different than in a communications center, hazardous materials area, training, personnel, or the office of the chief. With all of these available specialty areas, the Department has no plan that identifies the critical core KSA’s that officers in the Department should be proficient.
A new recruit, in the Department, will undergo 16 sixteen weeks of intensive focused training in academics and practical experiences to prepare for a year of closely supervised and evaluated KSA’s. Throughout this process the KSA’s important to succeed in Department and county government are stressed and applied. A candidate for promotion as a technician II will undergo a set of less specific course and practical work followed by supervised performance criteria in a non-emergent setting before being allowed to operate at an emergency. Throughout this process the critical KSA’s important to succeed in the Department at this level are stressed and evaluated. A potential paramedic candidate will undergo over a year of course work, supervised rotations, local, state and national certification examinations and internships. Throughout this process the critical KSA’s for success in the Department are stressed and evaluated.

Only recently, a draft recruit officer program was developed for newly promoted lieutenants (APPENDIX B). This draft program has not been adopted and is currently being evaluated. An officer at any rank must meet the requirements in the job descriptions. (APPENDIX C, D, E, F, G) The problem is that the Department does not have a model professional development program for officers. This lack of organizational direction has left the interpretation and decision making of what KSA’s are critical for future leaders of the Department to the individual who aspires to become an officer within the Department. It has also lead to the organization acceptance of a core skill set that may not be compatible with the demands of the position.

“We have to focus on the critical knowledge and skills that are needed to be successful.” (Galvin, et al.2002).
“The training most company officers receive is dedicated to fireground operations. Yet the majority of the company officer's time is spent in non-fireground activities. Perhaps it was once believed that if an individual were a good leader on the fire ground, it would follow that the same individual was a good manager at the station. Unfortunately, this is just not the case.”

(Culp 1995)

The critical skills for handling the non-emergent activities such as budgeting, personnel actions, and operating a facility are left for on the job training. Most officers do this way or that way based upon mimicking the way they saw someone else do it.

This applied research project is relevant to the National Fire Academy, *Executive Development* course in the area of professional development. An exploration of the critical skills needed in any organization will assist in identifying personal and professional strengths and weaknesses that can then be measured against organizational need. Further, identifying resources that offer assistance will give potential candidates a tool to use for further development. Finally, identification of critical skills and resources that provide assistance to enhance weaknesses will allow independent analysis of the standards for officers, such as NFPA, versus organizational needs and perhaps identify the need for enhancement of these standards and change the focus of officer professional development.
LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review was to gather information from within and outside of the fire service concerning professional development. Attempting not to fall into the typically incestuous search of only what fire departments do, I have looked outside the fire department across other industries such as health care, pharmaceuticals, rental service, internet service and chemical manufacturing. These industries are also struggling to define what personnel need to be educated in and how to best define and provide professional development. With this in mind, the answers to how best to provide professional development for the fire service may come from those who have attempted to resolve these issues in a more dynamic and revolutionary environment.

What should be done and who will do it, has been the debate since at least 1968 when Professor D. F. Favreau wrote:

“The steady stirring of interest in, and enthusiasm for, systematic and deliberate programs of higher education for the fire service in the past two years is most significant. Powerful currents are flowing toward professionalizing the fire service …. Toward enhancing the educational posture of the fire service …. Toward increasing research efforts …. Toward recruiting candidates with greater career potential.” (Favreau 1968)

In my interview with Edward J. Kaplan it struck me that the nations fire service problems concerning higher education have not changed much since 1968. Mr. Kaplans concerns are that providers of fire-related training, higher education, and
certification providers aren’t working together. He stated that, “The results of this are, at best, a fragmented system of professional development.” E. Kaplan (personal interview January 30, 2003)

The fire service is not unique in its inability to understand the importance of educating its personnel and defining what it means to meet the new and dynamic demands that come with promotion. The periodicals are full of articles concerning the importance of educating the work force and the lack of programs to do just that. Al Stubblfield CEO, Baptist Health Care presents a very similar problem concerning promotions as compared to the fire service:

“The health care industry is guilty of promoting the best workers without giving them the tools to be great leaders,” and, “Once a hospital promotes the best nurse on the floor, she is suddenly in charge of hiring and firing, supervising, motivating, disciplining, scheduling and patient care. But what tools has the organization given her to help her grow from being a great nurse to a great nurse leader?” (Galvin, et al. 2002)

Stubblfield has identified a problem within his organization and initiated change to address this issue. He created the Baptist Health Care Leadership Institute in Pensacola, Florida. Hank McKinnell CEO, Chairman of the Board, Pfizer, takes this issue to the next step of attempting to identify what is needed to be effective for their customer base and also identifying what limitations they have to provide training.

“But for training to help us and the patients we serve, it has to be specifically focused on the need and then immediately used to be of value. We don’t have the time or resources to train people in general; we have to focus on
the critical knowledge and skills that are needed to be successful.” (Galvin, et al. 2002)

Tom Cole President, Brann Forbes sets the example by practicing, participating and developing opportunities for personal and professional growth.

“Actions speak louder than words at Brann Forbes, where employees need only watch Cole and his team to realize how critical training and development is to the organization. Cole, president since 1999, is involved in developing the content for Brann University and helps facilitate as well as receives continual training himself. “ (Galvin, et al. 2002)

This president’s active involvement in the development of the content and receiving the training himself goes even further, “Training is about the coaching that people receive day in and day out. It’s about planning what kind of development opportunities people will need and setting expectations for managers and leaders.” (Galvin, et al. 2002) Setting the expectation of what we want our employees to do is a basic leadership concept that appears to be lost in the concept of professional development. This could also be that the fire service doesn’t know what it takes to develop good officers.

Brad Anderson, CEO of Best Buy had a similar problem. His organization became overextended during a period of rapid growth, they discovered that they did not know how to manage this and went outside the organization to bring the expertise they needed to succeed.

“ We worked with Accenture an RHR to bring knowledge we didn’t have and completely reworked how we thought about the business from a marketing point of view. We took what we learned and made it our own, but we
couldn’t have succeeded in the time frame without outside knowledge.”

(Galvin, et al. 2002)

Many fire departments have experienced not only rapid growth but also downsizing, increases in service delivery, and expansion of services. Going to the outside to help fire services better manage these changes is an option that is worth exploring.

The sharing of knowledge gained from experience is of critical importance and it is a way fire departments have informally mentored new employees for decades.

Michael D. Parker President & CEO, The Dow Chemical Co.,

“Dow is working to create an environment where organizational learning is embedded into the culture. I expect Dow employees to not only immerse themselves in formal training opportunities, but also to capture the knowledge gained from experience and share it with others across businesses and functions.” (Galvin, et al. 2002)

After an organization has set the expectations and identified a plan for professional development individuals and organizations need to take the responsibility to participate in the programs. William Morgenstern Chairman and CEO, Rentway Inc. recognizes this concept and sets the expectation.

“An organization has to recognize that it’s everybody’s responsibility to train, not just the training department. Self-development is critical, and the best players on our team teach themselves and go the extra step. Those who sit there and wait to be spoon-fed are the one’s who get left behind.” (Galvin, et al. 2002)
Personal responsibility for professional development is a link between all those who have come before and those who will be coming into the fire service. Whether formal or informal, didactic or practical, the learning each of us has today is based upon the hard work of others. Albert Einstein stated,

“Many times a day, I realize how much my own inner life is built on the labors of my fellow men, both living and dead, and how earnestly I must exert myself in order to give in return as much as I have received.”

(Caravalho 1996) We all have a responsibility to make it better for the next generations. The fire service has developed model plans for professional development.

“The professional development model is one product finalized at the 2002 FESHE IV conference. It is not a promotion model addressing credentials; rather, it is an experienced-based model that recommends an efficient path for the fire service professional development supported by collaboration between fire-related training, higher education, and certification providers.”

(United States Fire Administration 2002)

The importance of educating the work force, whatever field of interest, was similar regardless of the service or product companies provided. The approaches were very different and offered a wide variety of options from contracting, mentoring, on the job training, formal education etc. These contributors have influenced me in taking a wider view of professional development. This is especially true in the wide array of possibilities of moving forward in a professional development plan and more importantly recognizing that lifelong learning can be small and incremental.
The following contributors attempt to balance the previous group in understanding that professional development may have limits, unsubstantiated assumptions and costly outcomes. Dermott explains in his book that there are two basic skills needed to move forward, thus simplifying the professional development process. “There are two important skills that will help you move ahead: problem solving and networking.” (Dermott 2000)

Dilenschneider points out that this development is not without cost. He also brings out the importance of knowing what you want and if this will get you there. In the fire service this question has yet to be definitively answered but appears to be moving towards professionalism at an evolutionary pace.

“Before you return to school or start on an undergraduate degree, you have to consider whether this tool is going to get you what you want. Things to look at: Cost: According to the U.S. News and World Report, it now takes a middle-class parent ninety-five days of work to pay for a year at the average private college – versus forty-seven days twenty years ago.”

(Dilenschneider 1997)

Many of our employees are not only the parent but also the student. What is the impact of loosing ninety-five days of work in pay and lost effort at the work site? What should employers expect in terms of off the job effort to complete course work? The tough questions of why are we pushing for professional development are at the heart of his concerns and he backs it up with the following, “The Bureau of Labor and Statistics reports that one in five college graduates were doing jobs that didn’t require a college degree.” (Dilenschneider 1997) The fire service is part of these statistics. How many departments require a college degree for lieutenants, captains and even chiefs? He follows with advise to the individual, “In
my book, school should enhance your job performance, not interfere with it. Don’t let your education interfere with your job performance or networking.”

(Dilenschneider 1997) He also has this advise for the organizations, “Organizations that are lagging behind in providing flexible policies are finding it harder to recruit and retain good people. And the longer they wait to introduce programs, the more difficult it will be for them to catch up.” (Dilenschneider 1997)

What do we really know of the college experience and what it brings to the table?

“Whether four years of strenuous attention to football and fraternities is the best preparation for professional work has never been seriously investigated.” (White 1986) What empirical studies have been performed to substantiate the importance of higher education over the more traditional fire service programs? Is there a program available to become a chief officer? If so, does it solve the issues of professional development?

“Professionals built the Titanic – amateurs the Ark” ANON (White 1986) These contributors influenced this research by bringing some realities to the forefront. Employees are people and life continues throughout your career and there are limitations based upon where you are in your life. Whether health, family, finances or just time, sometimes the most important things in people’s lives have nothing to do with professionalism. These realities need to be accepted by individuals as well as organizations.
PROCEDURES

The purpose of this research project is to identify the current professional development practice for officers, the organizational expectations for officers within the Prince William County Department of Fire and Rescue and to recommend an approach to professional development for those aspiring to be an officer. The descriptive research methodology was used to answer the research questions.

The research process for this paper began in July 2002 with a search of the National Fire Academy’s Learning Resource Center. The process continued and further defining of the project necessitated additional searches in September and November of 2002. A final search of the Learning Resource Center was conducted in January 2003. I limited the original search to EFOP papers 1998-2002 and other texts on professional development. This search was very limited and necessitated a cross-reference to include career development. I also conducted a review of the Prince William County Virginia library system. This search was assisted through the Management and Government Information Center (MAGIC).

Several interviews were conducted with officers of the Department including: Chief of the Department Mary Beth Michos, Operations Division Chief Kevin McGee, Training Battalion Chief Brett Bowman and Operations Battalion Chief Steve Strawderman. An interviewed was held with Edward Kaplan, Education Specialist
with the National Fire Academy. The limitations of each of these were time dependent.

A review of the Departments training practices was obtained by requesting the history of the departments training program and past practices. This was limited to a lack of any historical record for the division.

A request was initiated to obtain professional development policies from the following surrounding fire departments in the Northern Virginia area, Fairfax County, Fairfax City, Arlington County, Alexandria County, Loudoun County and Fauquier County. Fairfax County was the only Department that responded to this request within the time limitations of developing this research.

An Internet search for professional development planning, Department of Labor and Fair Labor Standards Act was utilized.

The current job descriptions, evaluation processes and National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Standards were used to compare content versus needs expressed by those interviewed.

**RESULTS**

1. What are the typical components of a professional development program in fire departments and the private sector?
What is meant when the fire service speaks about professional development? The National Fire Academy’s Executive Development course addresses four enabling objectives in the professional development chapter but does not offer a definition of professional development. (United States Fire Administration 1998) Friedman, J. (2000) defines a profession as a, “certain activity that requires a high level of education and standard of ethical behavior. Professions include medicine, law, teaching, professional accountancy, and architecture.” The Department of Labor (2002) requires that an employee, “…primary work require advanced knowledge in a field of science or learning acquired through a lengthy course of study and instruction.” In my research, the definition and therefore the components of a professional development program were wide spread and dependant upon who was being asked the question. Professional development therefore within the fire service could not be defined in any single term but a synergistic grouping of concepts, education, experiences and mentoring that differs from organization to organization and from individual to individual. This, by definition, is not what other professions have experienced. In the business community there is a very specific core of KSA’s needed in order to be considered a professional.

“Most firefighters and officers have earned college credits and training certificates since their first day in the fire service. However, this professional development is usually uncoordinated and fragmented, resulting in duplications of effort and inefficiencies for students. Lack of coordination between fire-related training, higher education, and certification contributes to this problem.” (United States Fire Administration 2002)
These three general categories, fire-related training, higher education and certification are consistent in most departments and recommended model programs. This research supported the consistent application of these components of professional development in the fire service. They are also the focus of discussion for future planning of how to address professional development.

The Fairfax County Fire Department has a Career Development Plan (APPENDIX H) that identifies: fire officer I, II & III, instructor I & II, fire suppression methods, building construction, unit supervisory training, english, shift supervisory training, special operations, speech communications, public relations, command supervisory training, mathematics, human resource management, fire officer and the law, emergency management, conflict management, State and local government, Bachelors Degree requirement. These components are broken down into rank requirements as minimum criteria for each job classification listed.

Prince William County Department of Fire and Rescue also has requirements listed by rank. They include: CPR, HazMat awareness and operations, infection control, first responder, AED, BLS and ALS protocol, fire fighter I and II, EMT/C, BTLS, ACLS, PALS, E/T, infusion, internship completion, incident officer, pumper operator, aerial operator, officer I, II, III & IV, instructor I &II, HazMat incident command, PWC command. The Department also has specific requirements identified in the job descriptions for each position (APPENDIX I) which adds to the above list the following: high school diploma or equivalent, 30 quarter hours of college level training half of which must be fire/rescue related for lieutenant, 45 quarter hours for captains, Associates degree for Battalion Chief, Bachelors
degree for Division, Deputy Chief and Chief. All positions past the entry level require a minimum of two years in the previous position.

The NFPA 1021, 1997 edition, identifies the following as prerequisite knowledge for fire officers: Organizational Structure, Operating Procedures, Fire Prevention, Building Safety codes, Incident Management System, Socioeconomic and Political impacts to the Fire Service, Cultural Diversity, Supervisory Methodology, Supervisory Policies and Procedures. Additionally NFPA identifies the following prerequisite skills for officers: Verbal communications, Written Communications and the Ability to operate within an Incident Management System. Once these prerequisites are met then NFPA outlines an escalating course of study for officers in the following areas: Human Resource Management, Community and Government Relations, Administration, Inspection and Investigation, Emergency Service Delivery and Safety. (National Fire Protection Association 1997)

The International Fire Service Training Association (IFSTA) publication, Fire Department Company Officer, identifies the following responsibilities of company officers and further defines that these responsibilities are intended to cover the level I and II of the NFPA Standard: Assuming the Role of the Company Officer, Fire Department Structure, Company Officer’s Legal Responsibilities and Liabilities, The Company as a Group, Leadership as a Group Influence, Elements of Supervision and Management, Company Level Training, Government Structure, Community Awareness and Public relations, Public Education Program Development and Implementation, Labor Relations, Budgeting, Information Management, Fire Department Communications, Fire and Life Safety Inspections, Fire Investigation, Pre-Incident Planning, Incident Scene Communications, Incident


The Virginia Department of Fire Programs (VDFP) is charged with the,

“...statewide administration of fire service grant funds; delivering quality educational training programs; coordinating statewide fire service efforts; collecting and recording statewide incident statistics and fire training records; providing managerial guidance and operational assistance; facilitating the development and delivery of public fire education; and providing technical expertise and response assistance to the members of..."
Virginia's fire and emergency services to protect the citizens of the Commonwealth." (Virginia Department of Fire Programs 2002)

In keeping with this mission the VDFP has a Certified Fire Training Progression Chart NFPA and ProBoard Standards (APPENDIX J). This provides a progression of certification based training programs offered and clearly shows a methodical step-by-step process of advancement. This also shows a correlation between the programs offered and the national and state applicable standards that are met upon course completion.

The higher education area includes community college based fire and emergency medical services two-year programs. The Northern Virginia Community College offers Associate level degree programs in fire science and emergency medical services. The University of Maryland University College offers a Fire Science Undergraduate Program. This is part of the National Fire Academy Degrees at a Distance program. The National Fire Academy also offers multiple fire, EMS and disaster management programs.

In addition, and in some instances more importantly, the Department has identified other professional development aspects that are critical for success within the department. Through interviews with Chief Officers of the Department (APPENDIX K, L, M) they have developed the following additional components are also applicable to professional development as it pertains to Prince William County. Chief Michos has identified the need for officers and those who aspire to be officers to be proficient in; Technical expertise, People Skills, Attitude, Forward thinking, Educational values, Risk Taker, Teamwork, Focus on Service, Fire related training, Higher education, Certification
Chief M. B. Michos (personal interview January 8, 2003) also noted a deficiency between the desired KSA and the ability to package programs to meet these needs. The Department specifically does not have a plan for officers to chart their future professional development. This basic inability of the fire service to be able to answer this question is at the core of the services inability to become a profession. “If you don’t know where you are going, any road will lead you there.” (Culp 1995)

2. What components are presently offered for officers at Prince William County?

In it’s simplest form the components of professional development offered in Prince William County are, formal education, on-the-job training, state courses, National Fire Academy courses, mentoring, networking, multiple division experience, and other programs. It is important to expand upon each of these components in order to offer clarity on the specifics of what is already in place versus what is needed to be defined further and applied to a professional development plan for officers in the Department.

The Department brings to the table many benefits or incentives that assist the individual in obtaining further education or training. The basic component however, an organizational expectation and direction, is inconsistent. This leads to wasted time, energy and missed opportunities. The Department offers opportunities that may or may not assist in meeting the needs of the organization. These incentives are primarily financial, such as tuition reimbursement, in an
attempt to relieve some of the financial burdens associated with professional
development. The educational component of professional development is
attended outside the normal work schedule. Special circumstances have allowed
flexibility in this area but it is very limited and available to only a few participants.
Reimbursement for travel, tuition, etc. is available. This financial assistance is
subject to local economic factors and has lacked consistency over the long term.

On-the-job-training for officers includes a trial by fire approach as no formal
instruction or mentoring program currently exists. “I think it would be wonderful if
we could set up a formal professional development plan. I think the way we do
things now is backwards.” B. Bowman (personal interview January 8, 2003) The
County government has attempted to bring some training programs forward such
as Zenger-Miller Front-Line Leadership and most recently Enlightened Leadership.
These programs have not been fully embraced by the organization. The Zenger-
Miller program is no longer offered and Enlightened Leadership is a new program
that has only been offered for a few sessions. A recent draft officer probationary
manual (APPENDIX B) has been developed and is currently being evaluated.

State Level Training Classes are routinely offered and well supported by the
organization. These programs such as the Officer series are considered minimal
and many are incorporated into the Uniform Rank Structure procedure for the
Department. (APPENDIX I) Division Chief Kevin McGee stated,

“I think the State level classes are somewhere in between, I don’t think they
are as rigorous so I think they are not challenging you. They don’t cover the
breath of information but, put in a package they are an important piece of
your training and development. They are focused on those things you need to do your job.” K. McGee (personal interview January 8, 2003)

Personnel aspiring to become officers as well as those who are currently in those positions have routinely attended the National Fire Academy’s management series courses. The NFA is close in proximity to Prince William and we have taken advantage of the opportunities available. Division Chief McGee stated the, "National Fire Academy courses are more rigorous than state level classes and I’ve been very satisfied to see some of the additional work that is required pre-course work required as well as the research that is required afterwards.” K. McGee (personal interview January 8, 2003)

Mentoring in the department is successful in many aspects such as recruit training, driver operator and paramedic training. This has not been adopted as a means to assist officers within the Department. Informal mentoring occasionally occurs but is typically self-motivated and limited in scope.

Networking opportunities are available as a result of many of the previously mentioned professional development opportunities. Chief Michos stated, "I think the networking probably comes in to place more when you are starting your officer level, your Lieutenants and Captains. By the time somebody is a Captain they definitely should be in to the networking.” M. Michos (personal interview January 8, 2003)

Networking is not a formal program. It is left for the individuals to self-teach.
“Multiple division experiences are important from the standpoint of considering greater levels of responsibility beyond the level that you are at right now. It's becoming increasingly more important for us to have that personal vision not only within the organization but within the county government and how things operate in the external environment also. I think that having experience or exposure to that requires working in different places. I can see the difference between officers that have been in one place most of their career versus those who have been more diversified.” K. McGee (personal interview January 8, 2003)

Multiple division experience within the service is viewed by all chief officers as beneficial and offering a well-rounded experience level. The ability of the organization to continue to offer these experiences will be more limited as the organization grows.

3. What are the organizational expectations of the employee?

In Prince William County the organizational expectations are varied and non-specific. Basic tools for understanding what is expected of an employee are the organization job descriptions and evaluation tools. The position descriptions are general in nature but show a definitive change from the technical positions to managers in reference to education. The primary indicators however deal with performance criteria and not critical thinking skills at the lieutenant level and do not require an Associate level degree until the Battalion Chief level. In the Department the basic tool for officers is the Managerial and Professional Employees Performance Evaluation (APPENDIX N). This tool measures four goal areas
identified by the employee and the supervisor. Additionally, the tool evaluates employees in the following areas:

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The Department also has a policy titled, Uniform Rank Structure, 1995 (APPENDIX B) This document outlines the minimum certifications levels based upon rank within the organization. The certifications are, by definition, performance based.

Mary Beth Michos, Chief of the Department, states her expectations for professional development,

"I guess you know the departments put a lot of emphasis on people and their education and planning it out so that by the time they reach mid to higher level ranks that they do have the education that is necessary and their department is always really supportive." M. Michos (personal interview January 8, 2003)

The interviews also identified that professional development should include completion of all requirements of the position above the one being applied for. For example, a lieutenant candidate should have all the prerequisites for a captain’s position. This practice/belief is not identified in any official documents within the department and is out of step with the written procedure. The Department stress’ professional development during the annual evaluation process. This direction to
identify a plan for professional development is not accompanied by any specific direction from the organization.

4. What elements of professional development should be included in a Prince William County Department of Fire and Rescue program?

Organizations outline the expectations of the employee through the evaluation process, job descriptions, past practices and policy statements. This provides a written template that employees can reference to chart their individual strengths and weaknesses. In a perfect world these same evaluative criteria would be similar, if not identical to national standards and to actual performance and needs of the position. Hank McKinnell, CEO of Pfizer stated, “We have to focus on the critical knowledge and skills that are needed to be successful.” (Galvin, et al. 2002)

Department support from the chief is a critical element of a successful plan. “The most advanced fire training center, with its towers, drafting pits, simulators and the like, can’t assist in the officer development if there is a lack of commitment on the part of the fire [and rescue] department leadership.”(Culp 1995) Without this focus organizations spend precious time and energy on things that do not bring about success.

Prince William County should include a combination of concepts, education, experiences and mentoring. These have a correlation with fire related training, higher education and certification programs. In addition to these, a job task analysis should be performed for each position within the department. This process should clearly identify critical KSA’s for the position. These KSA’s can
then be compared to available programs and linked to provide a recommended
strategy for training, experience and education. This is the type of program that
Dave Gilman CEO of The First National Bank of Colorado has initiated, “The
initiative was to develop a program that provides a specific curriculum for every
position in the organization and then to deliver the curriculum through in-house
processes, computer-based training and outside professional instructors.” (Galvin,
et al. 2002)

DISCUSSION/IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this research project was to identify the current professional
development practice for officers, the organizational expectations for officers within
the Prince William County Department of Fire and Rescue and recommend an
approach to professional development for those aspiring to be an officer. The
research supports a lack of understanding of what professional development is and
that fire departments are slow to react to this issue. This is partially due to the use
of outside sources for professional development training. These outside sources
are financially driven and the fire service has been unable to provide a compelling
reason for them to change.

“There are no easy paths to uniting the “big three” of the fire an emergency
services professional development system. The relationship between the
providers of training, certification, and higher education are varied across
the country. In most States, levels of cooperation among the three ranges
from low to nonexistent. (United States Fire Academy 2002)
What are those barriers to get these groups together for the betterment of the fire service? Edward Kaplan was asked if there were a common thread with the “big three” as to why they can’t get together and offer a product. He stated. “Competition and full time equivalents (FTE) these equal dollars for the schools.” E. Kaplan (personal interview January 30, 2003) These impasses and financial needs of outside organizations will be difficult to address from anything other than a national initiative. Obviously in 2003 we, the fire service, have a contingent of experts that are fighting the fight and speeding this process to rapid resolution. “It’s primarily me and a few others who are passionate about this issue.” E. Kaplan (Personal interview January 30, 2003) What about the longevity of the fight for professionalism? Who picks up the torch if Edward Kaplan left the fight? The reality is that a few small pockets of individuals who can envision the benefit are making the push for professional development. Most of the problem lies in the fact that those who will do the work will never personally benefit. Kenneth Neumann, CEO, President and Founder of Neumann Homes encountered a similar problem, “As I evolved as a leader, I realized that while those things are important, the world is changing so fast that the real challenge is growing our people.” (Galvin, et al. 2002) Seeing this problem he created a solution to resolve the issue in a short time frame, “Under his direction nearly two years ago, the homebuilder created Nuemann University, which offers more than 85 courses within six certification programs.” (Galvin, et al. 2002)

Obviously there are many political impasses and battles still to be improved upon. With this lack of a national support structure, organizations need to be very independent in deciding what is important and how to get themselves there. “We, as responsible fire service managers, have to take a proactive role in preparing our
people for these diverse and increasingly complex challenges of the fire service today.” (Ott, 2000) The idea of system wide professional development is a long way off. Organizations, who strive to be part of a system of national fire service professional development, should define their program components to address timelines of success. The individual or an organization that implements a path or program for professional development may need to significantly redefine where they are going on a regular basis. For current members of the fire service many of these plans will be useless and therefore many may be left out, “If you are in the system now, this will do you no good. Those who follow you will benefit.” E. Kaplan (Personal interview January 30, 2003)

Chief Michos recognizes the importance of creating a comprehensive program and has initiated steps to start the process locally for the Department. What becomes of those within the Department who have fallen into the trap of expending energies on training, certifications and other attempts at professional development, that now may have little or no value. Today’s written direction significantly differs from the professional development wants of many of the chief level officers. This primarily surrounds higher education requirements.

“I think it's pretty obvious to all the senior staff they need to be going to college. Again we need a good professional development succession plan and were going to start working on that and we realized we needed a cultural audit first. This will make us see if we have any barriers that we present to anybody whether they be black, white, woman, male within the organization and that will take us from looking at our hiring processes and training on through to the top. Once we have that done it will be a much better system to go through when we develop professional development. I
think it will take two or three years.” M. Michos (personal interview January 8, 2003)

In his study David Ott attempted to, “…develop a professionally recognized fire service training criteria to assist in the development of a company officer training program…”. (Ott, 2000) He recommended using NFPA 1021 as the guiding document for development of a curriculum, and comparing job tasks for the position with this standard. This approach is prudent and generally accepted throughout the fire service and supported in draft models.

The Department has taken many steps to promote the next level of professional development. It has identified a certifications based minimum standard by rank. It has also identified minimum levels of college credits and Associate level degree programs. The challenges that will need to be addressed are how to identify equivalency for experience versus formal education and the timeline for implementation. How will the Department address the value, in terms of professional development, of persons already well into their careers who have had limited direction organizationally concerning what they need to be successful in today’s terms?

RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this research project was to identify the current professional development practice for officers, the organizational expectations for officers within the Prince William County Department of Fire and Rescue and recommend an approach to professional development for those aspiring to be an officer. Based
upon the findings of this research the Department should initiate the following recommendations in order to develop a professional development program.

1. Organizational support for a professional development program needs to be obtained. This should start from the Chief of the Department and be supported throughout the organization.

2. A committee to develop an action plan that coordinates this process from start to finish should be established.

3. The committee’s responsibilities are to include job/task analysis for all positions, cultural audit and to follow through with design, development and implementation recommendations.

4. The recommendations are to include timelines, resources and funding needs, Department and personal responsibilities.

5. The committee will also develop evaluative criteria to measure the effectiveness of the program.

The immediate implementation of these recommendations will assure that organizational support is achieved, an action plan is developed, and program development is coordinated. The initial timelines for the audit phases identified by Chief Michos are stated to be several years. This timetable sets the stage for estimates on the completion of these processes to fit into a five-year plan. “The future of the fire service, is most likely going to be determined by the actions of its managers and leaders today.” (Ott, 2000)
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