

SUCCESSION PLANNING

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP

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ABSTRACT

The problem that initiated this research project was the Bismarck Fire Department does not utilize succession planning to replace expected or unexpected employee departures.

The purpose of this applied research project was to produce an action plan that could be used to initiate the implementation of succession planning. The action research method, supported by descriptive research, was used to conduct this research project and answer the following questions:

1. What is succession planning?
2. How do shift personnel of the Bismarck Fire Department view succession planning?
3. What are the necessary components of an effective succession plan?
4. What are the benefits of succession planning?

The procedures used to compile this research consisted of a literature review of NFPA standards, trade publications, personal interviews and internal surveys.

The results of this research project effectively answered the research questions by identifying succession planning, capturing views of shift personnel from the Bismarck Fire Department, providing necessary components of succession planning, and defining the benefits of succession planning.

Recommendations were produced from the results of this research project which included an action plan that could be used to implement succession planning within the Bismarck Fire Department.

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INTRODUCTION

When a fire officer leaves an organization, a void is created. The loss of experience to the department is somewhat offset with the desire of the individuals who seek the opportunity to promote into the vacancy, but not immediately replaced.

Unfortunately, not all replacement needs are simply created by an employee's decision to separate employment, but may be produced by an unfortunate or catastrophic event. The fire service witnessed the latter on September 11, 2001 when 343 fire personnel from New York perished in the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center (J. Boespflug, personal communication, September 30, 2002).

To assure the safety and effectiveness of our personnel, succession planning has moved to a higher level of priority. The concept of preparing our organization to meet the expectations and needs of our citizenry is only accomplished when we also prepare our personnel. A major component of this preparation is having trained personnel available and ready to assume the various lines of progression in the organization whether the need be cyclical, temporary, or permanent (J. Boespflug, personal communication, September 30, 2002). The problem is the Bismarck Fire Department does not have a formal succession plan, which is the compelling force behind the initiation of this research project.

The purpose of this applied research project was to produce an action plan the Bismarck Fire Department could use to develop a succession plan. The action research method, supported by descriptive research, was used to conduct this research project, which consisted of personal communications, a literature review, and internal surveys to answer the following questions:

1. What is succession planning?
2. How do shift personnel of the Bismarck Fire Department view succession planning?
3. What are the necessary components of an effective succession plan?
4. What are the benefits of succession planning?

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

City of Bismarck

Bismarck is the capital and second largest city in North Dakota. Bismarck enjoys a population of approximately 55,000, contributes to a metropolitan population of approximately 85,000, and draws from a general trade population of approximately 165,000. Geographically, Bismarck adjoins the Missouri River and covers over 26 square miles.

The city of Bismarck was established in 1873 upon arrival of the transcontinental railroad. Today, in addition to being the center for state government, Bismarck's economy is strengthened through oil, coal, and synthetic fuel production, agriculture and agribusiness, and retail. Bismarck is also well known as a thriving and successful medical center (City of Bismarck, 2002; Schaefer, 2001).

Bismarck Fire Department

The Bismarck Fire Department is a career, paid department with 57 shift fire personnel consisting of 3 battalion chiefs, 15 lieutenants, and 39 firefighters operating out of 3 fire stations. Administrative positions consist of one fire chief, one assistant chief of operations, one assistant chief of support, one fire marshal, and one administrative assistant (Schaefer, 2001). An organizational chart can be

found in *Appendix A*.

Research

Historical data confirms that natural disasters have occurred in Bismarck and are likely to happen again in the future. This fact, coupled with other threat potentials of large-scale incidents including man-made disasters and acts of terrorism, requires a plan for intermittent replacement of fire personnel during these events (Schaefer, 2001).

In addition to cyclical replacement of personnel during large-scale incidents the need has existed to replace personnel who have left employment for various reasons, which will surface again as part of normal business operations. Preparing personnel to assume new positions would enhance the department and contribute to a safer community by minimizing the delay in filling vacancies. Therefore, minimizing vacancies would significantly improve the means to sustain business functions during both emergencies and normal day-to-day operations.

This research paper was written based upon the *Executive Leadership* (EL) course to satisfy the applied research requirements of the Executive Fire Officer Program at the National Fire Academy (NFA). Specifically, this research relates to Succession Planning, which was presented in module 6 of the EL *student manual* (pp. SM 6-1--6-39).

This research project provides leadership within the Bismarck Fire Department a tool that could be used to implement succession planning. This research may also help others regarding succession planning.

In addition, this research may contribute to the success of the United States Fire

Administration (USFA) meeting its *5-year Operational Objectives*, specifically, objective number three “To appropriately respond in a timely manner to emergent issues.” (USFA, 2000). Rationale would indicate that a well-trained workforce, coupled with effective organizational succession planning, would present a coordinated, competent, and uninterrupted commitment from the Bismarck Fire Department to further excel in its quest for internal and external excellence, which includes emerging issues.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review began with the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards pertaining to the professional qualifications of firefighters and fire officers. Materials used in the literature review were obtained from the Learning Resource Center at the National Fire Academy, the author’s personal and professional libraries, trade publications, and the Internet.

NFPA Standard Number 1001, *Standard for Fire Fighter Professional Qualifications* (1997), specifies the minimum job performance requirements (JPR) for fire fighters (p. 1001-5), while NFPA Standard Number 1021, *Standard for Fire Officer Professional Qualifications* (1997), specifies the minimum JPR for fire officers (p. 1021-5).

NFPA 1001 specifically broke the minimum JPR into two certification levels; Fire Fighter I and Fire Fighter II. Fire Fighter I dealt entirely with entry level knowledge, skill, and ability requirements such as rope identification, donning and doffing personal protective equipment, hand tools, hose and nozzle types and usage, fire extinguishment, etc. (pp. 1001--6-10).

Certification at Fire Fighter II level was outlined in NFPA 1001 with clear signs of

progression indicated in the JPR such as report writing, communication, and coordination of emergency incident tactics such as an interior fire attack team (p. 1001-10) as well as coordinating other tasks away from direct supervision (p. 1001-13).

Appendix B of NFPA 1001 specifically defined employee development and succession planning, which were defined as follows:

Employee Development. The professional qualifications standards can be useful to both the employee and the employer in developing a plan for the individual's growth within the organization. The JPR and the associated prerequisite knowledge and skills can be used as a guide to determine additional training and education required for the employee to master his job or profession.

Succession Planning. Succession planning or career pathing addresses the efficient placement of people into jobs in response to current needs and anticipated future needs. A career development path can be established for targeted individuals to prepare them for growth within the organization. The JPR and prerequisite knowledge and skills could then be used to develop an educational path to aid in the individual's advancement within the organization or profession (p. 1001-17).

NFPA 1001 influenced this research project by establishing the progressive relationship between Fire Fighter I and Fire Fighter II, as well as referencing employee development and succession planning for the entry and foundation level position of the fire service.

NFPA 1021 defined the four levels of progression and provided the requirements for these levels of fire officers. The levels were identified as “Fire Officer I, Fire Officer II, Fire Officer III, and Fire Officer IV.” (p. 1021-5). In addition, NFPA 1021 stated “the Fire Fighter II shall meet all the objectives for Fire Officer I before being certified at the Fire Officer I level” and certified at each of the remaining ranks as one progresses (p.1021-5).

NFPA 1021 also broke down the critical components of a JPR which were: (1) the task that must be performed, (2) tools and equipment that must be available to successfully complete a task, and (3) evaluation criteria and performance measurements (p. 1021-13).

NFPA 1021 influenced this research project by defining the four fire officer ranks and their progression sequence. This information, when coupled with NFPA 1001, clearly outlined the lines of progression an entry level firefighter could pursue with successful employee development and succession planning.

NFA (2000), a course at the NFA, defined succession planning as “an organized and systematic way to ensure that employees in a particular organization are capable, competent, and willing to replace and/or succeed to strategic roles within the organization.” In addition EL stated “Succession planning is a critical element of organizational strategy.” (p. SM 6-3).

NFA (2000) explained that an organization should conduct a capability analysis to determine a wide view of the organization’s strengths and subsequent weaknesses. The organization must clearly identify its capabilities, catalog required key individual competencies, and then align the workforce with these capabilities. Doing so will

provide a direction for the future and provide specific details of the skills and competencies the workforce must achieve to produce the desired organizational outcome and success (p. SM 6-3). To facilitate this analysis, NFA (2000) offered a matrix titled *Identifying Gaps and Surpluses* and relative process to complete the matrix and subsequent identification of prioritized capabilities (pp. SM 6--4-6).

NFA (2000) also offered a *Staffing Formula* (SF) that a supervisor can use for individual employee development planning. The basis of the SF is to assure individual development parallels that of the organization's mission. The crux of the information collected allows the supervisor to immediately ascertain developmental needs in addition to actual deployment to another position. The actual categories of information were described as "Right Person (RP)", which pertained to the employee's beliefs, values, motivations, and interests being right for the position; "Right Skills (RS)", which referenced the employee's ability to perform the job; "Right Time (RT)", which referred to the employee performing the job in harmony with the department's strategic status; "Right Place (RP)", which referred to the location of the employee in terms of the utmost good internally and externally of the department; and "Right Job (RJ)" which referred to the question of whether the particular job the employee performs is the correct one (pp. SM 6--6-7). NFA (2000) added one important statement "Keeping individuals in roles for which they are ill-suited is damaging for both the individual and the organization." (p. SM 6-7).

NFA (2000) added that personnel are chosen for upper level positions in numerous ways, which is irrelevant compared to the fact that there must be a stable of capable and competent candidates. This assures that the successful organization is

primed for unforeseen emergencies and can fill a vacancy immediately with a qualified candidate should the need present itself. NFA (2000) went on to add that it is crucial for a high performing organization to have a completely aligned and soundly qualified work force. The ideal situation exists when personnel are completely in-tune to the organization and their own career plans so that they can opt for promotional opportunities as they see fit (p. SM 6-6).

NFA (2000) added that assessing employee performance requires feedback to assure the employee understands the value they create as well as that they are doing the right thing. Feedback, when used properly, can enhance an employee by giving guidance and direction, motivating employees when they know their job is completed and performance meets expectations, and when given properly and timely helps retain and create high performing employees. Positive feedback also builds high self-esteem and improves mental stability (pp. SM 6-11).

NFA (2000) went on to state emphatically that feedback should only be used for the employee's development and must remain confidential and out of the employee's personnel record. Feedback must not be used for promotions or performance evaluations (p. SM 6-12).

A survey tool was provided by NFA (2000) that can assess the individual supervisor or manager's competencies in leadership and planning. This survey tool is completed by the individual supervisor or manager. The second survey tool assesses the same criteria but is completed by others in the organization. Once these two surveys are completed, the supervisor and individual employee have pertinent feedback to assist them in planning further development (pp. SM--6-13-19). NFA (2000)

emphasized that the feedback should remain anonymous, yet open and direct from the supervisor. Prior to the actual completion of the survey and collection of subsequent feedback, respondents should be oriented to the purpose of the survey and how the feedback will be used. NFA (2000) stated “the organization must be ready for 360-degree feedback, and that there is little or no negativity associated with the initiative.” It is also crucial that there is senior-level support and backing (p. SM 6-21).

NFA (2000) explained that every employee should have a development plan. Once the plan is developed it should be placed in the employee's file, which further confirms the organization's commitment to the individual's development (p. SM 6-21). NFA (2000) also provided a flowchart that depicted the creation of a development plan. Key components of the development plan included: (1) identifying compelling community reasons for mandatory executive development; (2) stating the department's strategic plan for meeting the community's needs; (3) identifying the leadership implications required to drive the strategic plan; (4) forming panels to identify competency requirements for key positions within the department; (5) assessing individuals in key strategic positions; (6) identifying required core competencies that all leaders in the department must possess; (7) and developing each individual's competency profile, which will be the conduit to eliminate any gaps that may exist (p. SM 6-22). NFA (2000) closed by stating documentation of the action plan is crucial and obtaining agreements and signatures are a must to demonstrate commitment (p. SM 6-23).

NFA (2000) influenced this research project by offering not only an explanation of succession planning but also the process to develop such a plan.

Coleman (1988) authored an article in *Fire Chief Magazine* regarding succession planning. Coleman explained how the development of personnel is the responsibility of the organization, the supervisors, and the employees themselves. Specifically, "The individual must provide the motivation and the intrinsic skill. The organization must provide the direction and the standards for that achievement." (p. 23).

Coleman went on to state that succession planning starts at the moment of hire, where new personnel receive orientation as to the careers available to them and the path they must travel to achieve them. In addition, every employee should have a career development guide which serves as a road map for their future. The career development guide would serve as a self-paced instructional program which would become useable should the employee desire to prepare themselves for promotion to a higher rank (p. 24).

Another important component of succession planning is a performance evaluation system that identifies unfavorable behaviors and corrects them so the employee can develop the initiative and sense of direction required to be effective in higher ranking positions (Coleman, 1988, p. 24).

Coleman added another component to successful succession planning, which includes creating an environment where people are challenged at all times (p. 25).

An additional component was described as creating an open and collective organizational atmosphere where there are opportunities to achieve. Coleman explained how opportunities to achieve should include exposure to opportunities outside of the organization as well. External exposures would broaden the individual's interpersonal skills and diversity, as well as analytical aptitude and ability to problem-solve, which are not always viewed as being traditional to the fire service

(p. 25).

Coleman (1988) influenced this research project by explaining that the responsibility for succession planning includes not only the organization but also the individual. Coleman also provided several components that further contribute to successful succession planning for the individual employee and organization alike.

Greengard (2001) discussed the horrendous attacks against the United States of America on September 11, 2001. The loss of life was inconceivable for organizations such as “Sun Microsystems, Cisco Systems, Cantor Fitzgerald, Oracle, AON Insurance, 3Con, Marsh & McLennan, Akamai, Raytheon, BEA Systems, MRV Communications, and the Fire Department of New York.” (p. 34).

Greengard (2001) went on to state that these organizations, and others that had key personnel aboard the four planes that crashed that fateful day, were left with gaping holes in their organizational structures. To deal with these gaping holes organizations had to instantaneously identify positions, competencies, and skills necessary to simply maintain current operations (p. 34).

It was readily admitted that no one could prepare for the incomprehensible events of September 11, 2001, but organizations can somewhat prepare for the unforeseen. For example, it is important to determine what needs to take place to keep the organization operating should key personnel suddenly leave, for whatever reason, which was identified as succession planning (Greengard, 2001, p. 34).

Succession planning was identified by Greengard (2001) as a map of the organization's future. Greengard added that knowing employee skills and competencies is crucial for any organization so that positions along the organizational structure can be

filled rapidly. In addition, the organization must know what the future requires of its employee's skills and competencies and determine the best method of training and preparing employees for management positions (p. 34).

Greengard (2001) added that succession planning not only prepares an organization for the unexpected, but also helps it maintain its competitiveness. In addition, succession planning aids individuals in focusing on excellence in the organization (p. 36).

Greengard (2001) went on to offer five keys an organization must follow to be successful with succession planning: (1) identify key leadership criteria so an organization knows what skills and competencies it requires to be successful, (2) identify potential leaders and motivate them through a system based upon 360-degree feedback, review of standards, and casual conversation to understand each employee's strengths, competencies, and interests so they can be given challenging tasks, (3) generate a feeling of accountability within the organization, supported by human resources but reviewed and overseen by administration, (4) align succession planning with the industry culture and maintain the focus on the foundation principals and standards, (5) quantify outcomes and reinforce wanted performance and behaviors which are documented and reviewed for successfulness by human resources. The organization must then reward, train, and motivate employees by assigning them to suitable projects, and assuring they follow their individual path of development (p. 36).

Greengard (2001) influenced this research project with discussion of the grim realities associated with the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks as well as the relative importance of an organization to prepare for possible unforeseen losses in key

positions. In addition, Greengard added the five keys to successful succession planning.

Smoke (2001) discussed how officer candidates were asked what their greatest fear in promotion was. The majority replied that their biggest fear was being promoted without some sort of officer training, especially in the areas of discipline, counseling, grievances, and other personnel matters (p. 56). Smoke went on to state that, "An effective company officer acts as a coach, counselor, mentor, and more to their crew." (p. 56).

Smoke (2001) added that certification of fire officers is crucial to those organizations that wish to become certified and accredited nationally. It is also key to the accreditation process and assures the citizens of the community that quality service is being provided as well as assuring that the companies have the best possible leadership. Combined, these external and internal components will assure the citizens that they are receiving the finest possible service from their fire department (p. 57).

Smoke (2001) influenced this research project by explaining the fears of officer candidates and that personnel-related training was crucial for their promotional success. In addition, there is a relationship between well-trained company officers, quality service delivered by their companies, and the ensuing comfort of the citizens themselves.

James Vossler, Director of the Harold Schafer Leadership Center at the University of Mary, offered several key points relative to succession planning. First and foremost, succession planning is a component of leadership. Leadership must be thoroughly connected to the organization's mission as well as the employees, whereby both can be driving forces of succession planning (J. Vossler, personal communication, November 6, 2002).

Vossler further explained the relative importance people within an organization have on the success of that organization. Specifically, how people must be familiar with all levels of the organization and the organization's leadership must be familiar with the future leaders within the organization. Another important aspect of succession planning is the development and advancement of those future leaders.

Vossler influenced this research project through his expertise in leadership, knowledge of succession planning, close proximity, and status as an informal mentor to the author.

The intent of this research project was to develop an action plan that the Bismarck Fire Department could utilize to initiate succession planning. The contents of the action plan would be derived from the information obtained through this literature review.

PROCEDURES

The literature review contained materials obtained through reference lists acquired from the Learning Resource Center (LRC) at the National Fire Academy, Emmitsburg, Maryland in July 2002. In addition, materials from the author's personal and professional libraries were used from July 2002 through November 2002.

The literature review consisted of materials pertaining to succession planning. These materials consisted of NFPA standards, trade publications, and a personal communication.

Personal communications were conducted with Joel Boespflug, Fire Chief of the Bismarck Fire Department, September 30, 2002; and Jim Vossler, Director of the Harold Schafer Leadership Center at the University of Mary which is located in Bismarck, North

Dakota, November 6, 2002. Both personal communications were brainstorming session rather than structured interviews conducted from a predetermined or developed set of questions.

The personal communications conducted with Chief Boespflug (J. Boespflug, September 30, 2002) centered around the events of September 11, 2002, as well as the need to develop personnel and have a pool of available talent who could assume higher ranking positions as necessary. Personnel safety, continuity of services, and sustained operations were also included in the personal communication.

The personal communications conducted with Mr. James Vossler (J. Vossler, November 6, 2002) centered around the relationship between succession planning and leadership, with the focus on succession planning.

Two internal surveys were initiated on August 29, 2002. The surveys were sent to firefighters and shift fire officers within the Bismarck Fire Department. Collectively, 55 surveys were sent to 18 out of 18 officers and 37 out of 39 firefighters due to one firefighter vacancy and one firefighter only being in position a few weeks. Both surveys sought information on current succession planning and ideas for improvements (*Appendix B*).

This research document, including the internal surveys and appendices, was produced using *Microsoft Word*. The organizational chart was constructed using the *MS Organizational Chart 2.0* feature located within the *Word* program and then inserted into the research document.

The recommendations themselves were obtained through this research project. Specifically, the literature review, internal surveys, and personal communications

contributed to the configuration of the recommendations.

The author was assisted by his spouse and colleagues throughout the development of this research project. In addition, the author solicited a personal and professional friend to proof-read the final draft of this project.

Assumptions

The author made the assumption that the internal survey sent to firefighters and fire officers within the Bismarck Fire Department would be received, completed, and returned at a rate closer to 100 percent versus the actual 24 percent that were returned. This assumption, in part, was do to the author's belief that others would see the importance of their contribution to this research project without personal solicitation from the author, which was a flaw on the author's part.

Limitations

This research project was limited by several factors. Limitations started with the personal communications where the author did not use predetermined questions, but rather a brainstorming approach during the actual interview.

This research project was required to be completed and submitted within six months from the author's completion of the *Executive Leadership* course at the National Fire Academy, Emmitsburg, Maryland. This timeframe did not allow this research project to extend further into private industry, which could have produced a more liberal product. Nor did the timeframe allow the author adequate time to actively solicit a greater number of responses to the internal surveys. Furthermore, since the author chose to use electronic mail to distribute the surveys, confirmation that everyone actually received surveys could not be determined.

The internal surveys themselves garnered only a small fraction of responses, which hindered their potential contribution to the outcome of this research. In addition, the survey instruments were developed by the author whose relative experience was limited to three previous research projects.

Definition of Terms

Executive Fire Officer Program (EFOP). The EFOP is a four year program of the National Fire Academy designed to provide senior fire officers with understanding of the need to be proactive versus reactive. The EFOP focuses on leadership, prevention, and risk reduction, with an emphasis on the value of lifelong learning and research. Upon completion of each of the four, two week courses, the EFOP student may receive graduate and upper-division baccalaureate college credit through various institutions of higher education (NFA, 2002-2003, p. 21).

Executive Leadership Course (EL). EL is the final course of the Executive Fire Officer Program. Design is centered around improving personal effectiveness through case studies, role playing, experiential activities, and leadership assessments. Course materials cover leadership, succession planning, influencing, leaders teaching leaders, coaching and mentoring, evaluation, and decision-making, which contributes to the student's executive-level knowledge, skills, and abilities (NFA, 2002-2003, p. 29).

RESULTS

1. What is succession planning?

NFPA 1001 discussed firefighter performance requirements as well as the need for employee development and succession planning. Employee development was described as a beneficial planning tool that both employee and employer could use to

carve out a career path based upon prerequisite knowledge and skills and supportive educational requirements.

NFPA 1001 described succession planning as the filling of positions with qualified personnel based upon current or projected needs. Succession planning couples employee development with individual targeted educational requirements and the needs of the organization.

NFA (2000) stated that succession planning is a crucial component of organizational strategic planning. Succession planning is a structured and meticulous process that prepares and develops able, knowledgeable, and willing employees to succeed to strategic positions.

Greengard (2001) described succession planning as the organization's crystal ball, which allows them to plan for the departure and replacement of key individuals and still maintain operations.

2. How do shift personnel of the Bismarck Fire Department view succession planning?

Following is a narrative summary of survey results from responding internal firefighters and fire officers:

Officer survey question 2. (9 replies) When asked if current officers expected to pursue a chief fire officer position, 45 percent of respondents said they agreed, 33 percent said they are neutral, and 22 percent disagreed.

Firefighter survey question 2. (4 replies) When firefighters were asked if they intend to pursue a promotion to a fire lieutenant position, 75 percent of those responding to the survey indicated they agreed and 25 percent stated they are neutral.

Firefighter survey question 3. (4 replies) 75 percent of firefighter respondents stated they are neutral in pursuing a chief officer position after promotion to fire lieutenant and 25 percent indicated they disagreed.

Firefighter survey question 4a. (4 replies) When firefighters were asked if they felt the department has the tools in place to allow success in moving to a fire lieutenant position, 25 percent indicated they agreed, 25 percent indicated they are neutral, 25 percent stated they disagreed, and 25 percent strongly disagreed.

Firefighter survey question 4b. (4 replies) When asked if firefighters felt the department had prepared them to assume a vacant lieutenant position, 50 percent responded they agreed, 25 percent indicated they are neutral, and 25 percent indicated they disagreed.

Officer survey question 3a. (9 replies) When asked whether the department have the tools in place to allow success in moving to a chief officer position, 44 percent stated they agreed, 22 percent were neutral, and 33 percent disagreed.

Officer survey question 3b. (9 replies) When fire officers were asked if they felt the department had prepared them to assume a vacant chief officer position 11 percent strongly agreed, 67 percent agreed, 11 percent were neutral, and 11 percent disagreed.

Collectively, both firefighters and fire officers indicated on a majority of surveys a need for additional training to prepare personnel for advancement. Specific training needs were identified as an officer training program, interpersonal skills development, conflict resolution, dealing with difficult people, leadership, and organizational dynamics. Several surveys indicated a need to spread this training to all firefighters and officers.

Other items mentioned included: (1) starting pay for supervisors that exceeds

that of their subordinates; (2) on the job training through acting officer positions to improve one's effectiveness prior to promotion; (3) retirement benefits calculated on the individuals actual pay; (4) improved standard operating guidelines; (5) mandatory job related coursework for officers, with the *Executive Fire Officer Program* at the National Fire Academy mentioned as well; (6) clearly and clearer defined roles, expectations, and responsibilities of chief level officers; (7) improved lines of communications throughout entire department; (8) career counseling; (9) the need for individuals themselves to place more emphasis on promotion; (10) research decline in numbers seeking promotions; (11) and the continuation of leadership implementation within the department to maintain motivation and remain dynamic.

Further detailed survey results can be found in *Appendix C*.

3. What are the necessary components of an effective succession plan?

Several authors (Coleman, 1988; Greengard, 2001; and NFA 2000) described components of succession planning as aligning personnel with the organizational direction and mission. Specific components included evaluation, employee development, feedback, and strategic planning.

Another component offered by Coleman (1988) included creating a challenging, open, and cooperative environment, which include opportunities to achieve.

NFA (2000) explained how an organization must analyze itself and its human resources. The analysis of human resources gives the organization an inventory of available personnel and what they must receive for development before being ready to assume added responsibilities.

To accomplish assessments, analysis and creation of development plans, NFA

(2000) offered several tools in the form of a matrix, flowchart, staffing formulas, and surveys that an organization could utilize to capture the data it needs for succession planning and relative decision-making.

Personal Communication

Succession planning is virtually a component of successful leadership practices and organizations alike (J. Vossler, personal communication, November 6, 2002). Vossler added that leadership is either everywhere or it is nowhere. In other words people at all levels must be knowledgeable about the organization and positions within the organization, and have the ability to make appropriate decisions to accomplish the organizational mission.

Vossler went on to explain how successful leadership encompasses succession planning as one of its components. Specifically, how organizations he works with on a regular basis target their future leaders. Training, educational opportunities and advancements require commitments of time from both the organization and the employees. Another important aspect is the fact that the employees themselves also drive succession planning.

Vossler offered three key ingredients of successful organizations relative to succession planning. These ingredients are: (1) competency, (2) embraced values, (described as all personnel understanding, supporting, and believing in the organization and its mission) and (3) service learning, which encompasses education and continuing education, with emphasis on arranging opportunities and encouraging employees to attend external educational opportunities.

To assure that everyone operates towards the focal point of the organization,

which is the mission, Vossler explained how policies and procedures that are tried, true, and field-tested, must exist. Doing so assures everyone is not only working towards the same goals, but succession planning becomes much more of an aligned process.

Vossler added that mentoring programs with measurable outcomes and assessments are also an important component of succession planning since employees would then have the opportunity to experience first-hand what each position is responsible for within the organization.

4. What are the benefits of succession planning?

Coleman (1998) asserted that an employee can receive knowledge on the organizational vision and how their career path could develop accordingly when they are exposed to succession planning at the start of their employment.

Several authors (Coleman, 1988; NFA, 2000) explained how employees could be more positive and productive when the evaluation they receive from the organization matches the organization's planning and needs. NFA (2000) expounded on how evaluations can increase employee morale, motivation, retention, and self-esteem. Coleman explained other benefits which included challenged employees, an open organizational environment, and opportunities for success.

NFA (2000) also explained how succession planning could help an organization identify its strengths and weaknesses. In addition, an organization will also identify its capabilities and learn of and verify the needed human competencies. Once these items are identified, succession planning could then produce a workforce that is aligned with the organization's mission and direction, which could thereby contribute to the successfulness of the organization.

NFA (2000) further explained how each supervisor could readily identify individual employee developmental levels through succession planning records, which, in essence, matches organizational human resource needs with organizational mission. Doing so eliminates the potential for an unjust job fit where an employee may assume a position before they, and the organization, are ready. Matching human resource needs to the position also creates an environment where vacancies can be filled rapidly. In addition, individuals gain the benefit of accomplishing their career goals, in their timeframe.

Greengard (2001) added that succession planning readies an organization for unexpected vacancies and also helps them remain successful in their business ventures. This is accomplished because personnel are competent and ready to assume vacancies, which could otherwise cripple an unprepared organization.

Smoke (2001) explained how preparing fire officer candidates for promotion will remove the majority of fears that prevail prior to the actual promotion itself. Smoke also added that a fire department which adequately trains and specifically certifies its fire officers accomplish a crucial component of nationally recognized accreditation. A greater sense of assurance also exists among department employees and the citizens of their community alike.

An action plan (*Appendix D*) was produced that provides an outline of information that could be used to implement succession planning in the Bismarck Fire Department. Components include identification of applicable standards and job performance requirements, officer candidate identification process, officer candidate training program, assessments and analysis of department capabilities, individual employee

needs, subsequent development plans, and developmental needs of supervisors.

DISCUSSION

The pretext that initiated this research project spoke of the need for an organization to replace personnel who have departed for a variety of reasons (J. Boespflug, personal communication, September 30, 2002). Greengard (2001) further expounded on situations that several organizations found themselves in on September 11, 2001.

The author supported the writing of Greengard (2001), specifically where it was stated that these organizations not only had to replace personnel who were lost on this fateful day but had to sustain their business operations while doing so. Greengard went on to explain that, while no single organization could have foreseen these acts of terror unfolding, an organization can make preparations to prepare itself for most unexpected departures through succession planning.

The author felt succession planning was clearly defined through NFPA 1001 (1997) and the writings of several authors (Greengard, 2001; NFA, 2000), which offered the conclusion that succession planning is just that, planning.

While NFPA 1001 focused on the preparation of the individual employee, NFA (2000) and Greengard were more in-depth with connecting the needs of the organization with the development of employees to maintain business operations. The author also understood the need to unite the needs of the organization with the future development of employees, which in turn provides the continuity an organization needs to maintain its operations.

Survey results from firefighters and fire officers (*Appendix C*) consistently spoke

of the need for training to prepare personnel for promotion into higher ranks. These results echoed that of several authors (NFPA 1001, 1997; Coleman, 1988; Greengard, 2001; NFA, 2000; and Smoke, 2001) who explained the importance of employee development.

Another specific request for development was mentioned in the survey results was described as a need for on the job training. The benefit of a mentoring program was provided by Vossler (J. Vossler, personal communication, November 6, 2002). The author not only supported the findings of the *Literature Review* in regards to employee development but also was supportive of the survey results where this need was articulated.

The author was also inspired by the mere fact that aspirations exist among surveyed personnel to pursue future promotions and/or their confidence to assume a temporary appointment to a higher rank. Greengard (2001) spoke of the need for an organization to have people ready to assume a vacant position, which aligned with this survey result. Survey results also indicated a need to improve the department's ability to prepare employees for advancement. These results supported the problem that initiated this research project.

Several survey responses indicated a need to incorporate human resource training for all firefighters and officers, as well as establish clearly defined expectations and improve lines of communication. These responses caught the author's attention because of their relationship to the interview held with Vossler (J. Vossler, personal communication, November 6, 2002). During the interview Vossler was specific about the need to assure that all personnel are knowledgeable about the organization and the

positions available within the organization.

Vossler (J. Vossler, personal communication, November 6, 2002) stated the need to establish policies and procedures. This same need was captured through survey results where personnel stated a need for improved standard operating guidelines so everyone is operating in the same direction, which is supported whole-heartedly by the author.

Continue implementing leadership, remain dynamic, and desire others within the Bismarck Fire Department to participate in outside training such as the National Fire Academy's *Executive Fire Officer Program* were also contained within the survey results. The author was pleased to see these responses, especially since similar references were obtained during a personal interview (J. Vossler, personal communication, November 6, 2002). One of the top three key ingredients to successful succession planning provided by Vossler was identified as encouraging employees to obtain external educational opportunities. The author believes the need to have employees experience what other like organizations are doing will enhance morale and minimize the resistance to change experienced by reclusive or otherwise stagnant organizations. This was further expounded upon by Coleman (1988) who provided that organizations must provide an atmosphere that is open and encouraging.

Several authors (Coleman, 1988; Greengard, 2001; and NFA 2000) provided components of succession planning that aligned employees with the organizational mission, which the author found quite useful and contributed to the success of this research project.

Coleman (1988) discussed the need for creating an environment that challenges

people and that the organizational atmosphere is open, cooperative, and provides opportunities for achievement. The author found this to be a basis for the alignment of each and every employee to the organization's mission, which was also reiterated during personal communications (J. Vossler, personal communication, November 6, 2002).

The author found the contributions made by NFA (2000) regarding the assessments of the organization and the employees crucial components. When assessments are completed, an organization can then determine the organizational needs and develop its employees accordingly, which the author believed will further align the employee with the organization and vice versa.

The author felt using the assessment tools, or some form thereof, provided by NFA (2000) would be invaluable during a strategic planning process and contribute to the overall development of a succession plan for the Bismarck Fire Department. Key areas to be assessed would be organizational strengths and weaknesses, employee developmental needs, and community needs.

Coleman (1998) specified and NFPA 1001 (1997) implied that succession planning should begin during the initial stages of an employees employment. Coleman was specific that succession planning actually needs to start during the initial hiring orientation period. The author clearly understood the benefits that NFPA 1001 and Coleman were asserting; the earlier the employee is oriented to the organization's mission and needs, as well as the opportunities available to the employee, enhances the potential to align organizational mission with the employee's career path is enhanced.

Several authors (Coleman, 1988; NFA 2000) also explained how succession planning could produce a more positive and industrious employee. The author agreed and understood the rationale behind positive and productive employees accomplishing more for both themselves and the mission of the organization. The author's belief is further clarified through NFA (2000) assertions that aligned employees can have higher morale, are motivated, remain in the organization longer, and have a higher self-worth.

Another benefit offered through succession planning was provided by NFA (2000), which was the identification of organizational strengths and weaknesses. The author found this information to be prerequisite to strategic planning and realized the importance of EL providing this information so an organization can determine the needed competencies of its workforce.

NFA (2000) clearly stated, as did information obtained during a personal interview (J. Vossler, personal communication, November 6, 2002), that a benefit of succession planning must be the alignment of the employees with the organization mission. The author found this paramount to success for both.

The author also supported the benefit that was added by Greengard (2001), that unexpected vacancies could be more quickly eliminated since succession planning would produce a competent and prepared pool of employees.

The author was able to obtain useful and valuable information through this research project that was used to construct the action plan (*Appendix D*) for implementing succession planning. While the action plan itself must be deemed the initial step, the content of this research will be of further value once the actual strategic planning process begins. The author also submits that additional research would be

necessary prior to and during actual implementation of succession planning. One component of additional research must cover the relationship between succession planning and leadership.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are intended to help the Bismarck Fire Department with succession planning . However, others may find them beneficial in their quest for succession planning.

1. Utilize the assessment tools contained within the Executive Leadership curriculum pertaining to succession planning. Collect assessed data and use it during the strategic planning process.
2. Do not use electronic mail as the sole means of conducting surveys or collecting data. A combination of electronic mail and personal discussion should be used to effect higher percentage responses. This will also give the opportunity for those being surveyed to better understand the intent of the survey process and subject being researched.
3. Conduct a thorough strategic planning process pertaining to succession planning. Throughout this strategic planning process the action plan developed by the research project should be scrutinized and modified as necessary to enhance success of succession planning.
4. Evaluate succession planning efforts, successes, and determine changes necessary to continually improve effectiveness.
5. Exercise succession planning in table-top, functional, and full-scale exercises

- to assure functionality. Utilize mentoring to assure succession planning is operational for day to day operations.
6. Encourage other agencies to implement succession planning to assure continuity of their services, which should include their ability to sustain mutual operations with other agencies during large-scale incidents or disasters.

Closure

The intent of these recommendations is to provide a means to initiate succession planning within the Bismarck Fire Department. Continuity of service will benefit not only the department but the community and citizens alike.

Unfortunately, we live in a day and age where the horrific acts witnessed on September 11, 2001, could occur again. Succession planning will give us the confidence and means to face day-to-day operational needs or complicated and multi-faceted emergencies in a much more sustained manner than before, since the organization as a whole will be aligned.

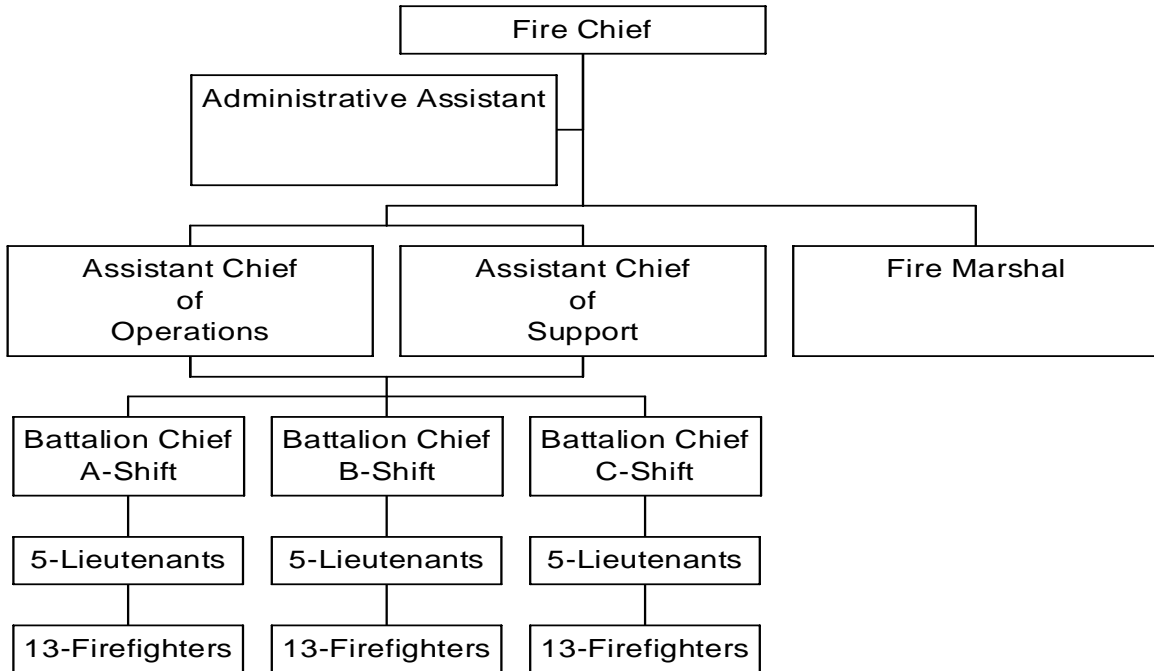
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Appendix A

Bismarck Fire Department Organizational Chart



Appendix B

Survey B1

Succession Planning - Internal Officer Survey

The intent of this survey is to obtain feedback from you that could be used as part of my research project.

Recently, I finished my fourth and final year of the Executive Fire Officer Program at the National Fire Academy. Part of my remaining requirements includes completion of an applied research project. My topic for this final applied research project is Succession Planning.

I would be honored if you would take the time to complete this survey and return it to me. Simply complete the survey form on your computer, print it, and send it to me if you wish to remain anonymous. Otherwise simply complete the survey and email your results back to me. Either way, I thank you for your response.

This research project has a deadline I must reach. To assure I reach this deadline, your results would need to be returned to me prior to September 20, 2002.

Sincerely,

Kermit Schaefer

Survey Questions

Demographic Information (Optional):

1. Years of Service:
 _____0-5 _____6-10 _____11-15 _____16-20 _____20+

Years in officer position:
 _____0-5 _____6-10 _____11-15 _____16-20 _____20+

Age:
 _____18-30 _____31-40 _____41-50 _____50+

2. Do your professional plans see you pursuing a promotion to a chief officer rank?

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

3. In viewing Succession Planning as moving from one rank to a higher rank:
 a. Do you believe our department has the tools in place that will allow you or fellow fire officers to successfully move to a chief officer position in the future?

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

b. Should the situation arise where you would be required to fulfill a chief officer position immediately, do you feel the department has adequately prepared you to undertake this task on a temporary basis?

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

1. In your own words, what do you feel would be needed to improve our department's succession planning?

2. In your own words, what do you feel would be needed to improve your professional career goals?

3. In your own words, please feel free to add any additional information that you feel may be of use to this research project.

Appendix B

Survey B2

Succession Planning - Internal Firefighter Survey

The intent of this survey is to obtain feedback from you that could be used as part of my research project.

Recently, I finished my fourth and final year of the Executive Fire Officer Program at the National Fire Academy. Part of my remaining requirements includes completion of an applied research project. My topic for this final applied research project is Succession Planning.

I would be honored if you would take the time to complete this survey and return it to me. Simply complete the survey form on your computer, print it, and send it to me if you wish to remain anonymous. Otherwise simply complete the survey and email your results back to me. Either way, I thank you for your response.

This research project has a deadline I must reach. To assure I reach this deadline, your results would need to be returned to me prior to September 20, 2002.

Sincerely,

Kermit Schaefer

Survey Questions

1. Demographic Information (Optional):

Years of Service:

0-5 6-10 11-15 16-20 20+

Age:

18-30 31-40 41-50 50+

2. Do your professional plans see you pursuing a promotion to the rank of fire lieutenant?

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

3. Do your professional plans see you pursuing a promotion to a chief officer rank once you have attained the rank of fire lieutenant?

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

- 4. In viewing Succession Planning as moving from one rank to a higher rank:
 - a. Do you believe our department has the tools in place that will allow you or fellow firefighters to successfully move to the position of fire lieutenant in the future?

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

- b. Should the situation arise where you would be required to fulfill a fire lieutenant position immediately, do you feel the department has adequately prepared you to undertake this task on a temporary basis?

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

- 5. In your own words, what do you feel would be needed to improve our department's succession planning?

- 6. In your own words, what do you feel would be needed to improve your professional career goals?

- 7. In your own words, please feel free to add any additional information that you feel may be of use to this research project.

Appendix C

Table C1

Sent and Returned Surveys

Sent to:	Returned	Sent to:	Returned
Firefighter – 1	X	Officer – 1	X
Firefighter – 2	X	Officer – 2	X
Firefighter – 3	X	Officer – 3	X
Firefighter – 4	X	Officer – 4	X
Firefighter – 5		Officer – 5	X
Firefighter – 6		Officer – 6	X
Firefighter – 7		Officer – 7	X
Firefighter – 8		Officer – 8	X
Firefighter – 9		Officer – 9	X
Firefighter – 10		Officer – 10	
Firefighter – 11		Officer – 11	
Firefighter – 12		Officer – 12	
Firefighter – 13		Officer – 13	
Firefighter – 14		Officer – 14	
Firefighter – 15		Officer – 15	
Firefighter – 16		Officer – 16	
Firefighter – 17		Officer – 17	
Firefighter – 18		Officer – 18	
Firefighter – 19			
Firefighter – 20			
Firefighter – 21			
Firefighter – 22			
Firefighter – 23			
Firefighter – 24			
Firefighter – 25			
Firefighter – 26			
Firefighter – 27			
Firefighter – 28			
Firefighter – 29			
Firefighter – 30			
Firefighter – 31			
Firefighter – 32			
Firefighter – 33			
Firefighter – 34			
Firefighter – 35			
Firefighter – 36			
Firefighter – 37			
*Firefighter – 38	*Did not send, in position for two weeks at time of survey.		
**Firefighter – 39	**Did not send, position vacant at time of survey.		

Appendix C

Table C2

Survey Results – Officers

1. Years of Service: 0-5 _____ 6-10 <u> 3 </u> 11-15 <u> 3 </u> 16-20 <u> 2 </u> 20+ _____ Years in officer position: 0-5 <u> 4 </u> 6-10 <u> 2 </u> 11-15 <u> 1 </u> 16-20 _____ 20+ _____ Age: 18-30 _____ 31-40 <u> 4 </u> 41-50 <u> 3 </u> 50+ _____				
2. Do your professional plans see you pursuing a promotion to a chief officer rank? Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree _____ <u> 4 </u> <u> 3 </u> <u> 2 </u> _____				
3. In viewing Succession Planning as moving from one rank to a higher rank: a. Do you believe our department has the tools in place that will allow you or fellow fire officers to successfully move to a chief officer position in the future? Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree _____ <u> 4 </u> <u> 2 </u> <u> 3 </u> _____				
b. Should the situation arise where you would be required to fulfill a chief officer position immediately, do you feel the department has adequately prepared you to undertake this task on a temporary basis? Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree <u> 1 </u> <u> 6 </u> <u> 1 </u> <u> 1 </u> _____				
4. In your own words, what do you feel would be needed to improve our department's succession planning?				
Synopsis of returned surveys: (1) all levels of supervision need to be included in the decision-making process, which would allow the details to be passed onto personnel in an accurate manner; (2) salaries for supervisors above their subordinates, which has affected the number of personnel who are simply interested in promoting to a higher level of supervision; (3) improve standard operating guidelines to by providing more of them for various situations, which would bring greater continuity to all shifts; (4) provide leadership training for firefighters; (5) develop and implement an officer training program for both company and chief level officer ranks, with an emphasis on interpersonal skills; (6) personnel paying into and				

receiving retirement benefits based upon their salaries (7) allow officer candidates to fulfill an acting officer position for a period of time to become involved which would give them greater exposure and understanding of the actual position (8) train and expose firefighters in the officer positions which would give them a better understanding of the roles and responsibilities of an officer; (9) increased training in areas such as personnel, conflict resolution, and emergency operations to improve the role modeling that is currently available; (10) enroll officers in mandatory, job related, coursework; and (11) the National Fire Academy's EFO Program would be beneficial to all officers.

5. In your own words, what do you feel would be needed to improve your professional career goals?

Synopsis of returned surveys:

(1) single issue would be training; (2) more clearly defined job descriptions for higher level positions that have a more defined workload, especially the administrative functions of the battalion chiefs; (3) improved communications between all layers of management; (4) take advantage of all opportunities to improve knowledge, skills, and abilities to prepare for promotion; (5) further understanding of the roles and expectations of the chief level officers, especially non-emergency; (6) training to improve conflict resolution, dealing with challenging personnel, organizational dynamics, and leadership; and (7) provide tuition reimbursement for officers to attend college.

6. In your own words, please feel free to add any additional information that you feel may be of use to this research project.

Synopsis of returned surveys:

(1) the department offers training opportunities to chief level officers, but it would be advantageous to offer this training to company officers also; (2) expose company officers to chief level position so they can gain experience and better understanding of the chief level positions; (3) overall, the fire service has focused primarily on emergency operations, but clearly sees the need to instill leadership; and (4) continue implementing leadership to assure the fire service and our department remains motivated and dynamic, yet safe and effective during emergencies.

Appendix C

Table C3

Survey Results – Firefighters

<p>1. Years of Service: 0-5 <u> 2 </u> 6-10 <u> 2 </u> 11-15 <u> </u> 16-20 <u> </u> 20+ <u> </u></p> <p>Age: 18-30 <u> 1 </u> 31-40 <u> 2 </u> 41-50 <u> </u> 50+ <u> </u></p>				
<p>2. Do your professional plans see you pursuing a promotion to the rank of fire lieutenant?</p> <p>Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree</p> <p><u> </u> <u> 3 </u> <u> 1 </u> <u> </u> <u> </u></p>				
<p>3. Do your professional plans see you pursuing a promotion to a chief officer rank once you have attained the rank of fire lieutenant?</p> <p>Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree</p> <p><u> </u> <u> </u> <u> 3 </u> <u> 1 </u> <u> </u></p>				
<p>4. In viewing Succession Planning as moving from one rank to a higher rank:</p> <p>a. Do you believe our department has the tools in place that will allow you or fellow firefighters to successfully move to the position of fire lieutenant in the future?</p> <p>Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree</p> <p><u> </u> <u> 1 </u> <u> 1 </u> <u> 1 </u> <u> 1 </u></p>				
<p>b. Should the situation arise where you would be required to fulfill a fire lieutenant position immediately, do you feel the department has adequately prepared you to undertake this task on a temporary basis?</p> <p>Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree</p> <p><u> </u> <u> 2 </u> <u> 1 </u> <u> 1 </u> <u> </u></p>				

5. In your own words, what do you feel would be needed to improve our department's succession planning?

Synopsis of returned surveys:

(1) there is some training available; however, the training currently provided to officers would be of use to everyone seeking promotion; (2) we simply need more training; (3) all firefighters, both veteran and apprentice, would benefit from fire science related training; (4) provide an effective fire officers training program, which would benefit all officers; and (5) better starting salary for newly promoted lieutenants that would assure they are paid more than the firefighters they supervise.

6. In your own words, what do you feel would be needed to improve your professional career goals?

Synopsis of returned surveys:

(1) we need more training and career counseling; (2) individuals would need to place more emphasis on advancement; (3) interest in promotion may come with additional experience; and (4) implement an officer training program.

7. In your own words, please feel free to add any additional information that you feel may be of use to this research project.

Synopsis of returned surveys:

(1) recent years have seen a decline in the number of personnel interested in promotion, which needs to be researched to find out the reasons; and (2) as a result of the decline in numbers of personnel seeking promotions the department has stated it may look outside for candidates, which is threatening.

Appendix D

Succession Planning – Action Plan

Goal:

Develop a means to implement succession planning.

Terminal objective:

Conduct strategic planning process to develop succession plan and related action plans for implementation thereof.

Objectives:

1. Identify applicable standards and associated job performance requirements for each rank.
2. Develop officer candidate identification process.
3. Develop officer candidate training program:
 - a. Internal on-the-job training program.
 - b. External comprehensive coursework:
 - i. National Fire Academy
 - ii. Higher Education
 - iii. Regional Opportunities
 - c. Practical assessment.
 - d. Mentoring program.
4. Identify succession planning needs created by or during emergencies.
 - a. Develop specific succession plan for use during emergencies.
 - i. Emergencies less than 24-hours.
 - ii. Emergencies greater than 24-hours.
 - b. Test succession plan during training exercises.
 - c. Evaluate succession plan effectiveness.
 - d. Modify succession plan as necessary.
5. Complete/conduct assessments and analysis' offered through the National Fire Academy's *Executive Leadership* (2002) curriculum:
 - a. Matrix - *Identifying Gaps and Surpluses* to prioritize department capabilities.
 - b. *Staffing Formula* – to develop individual employee development plan.
 - c. Supervisory assessment tool – to assess individual supervisor through 360 degree feedback to assist in developing plan for any developmental needs.