**DEVELOPING FUTURE EXECUTIVE FIRE OFFICERS THROUGH A FORMAL
MENTORING PROGRAM**

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF CHANGE

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ABSTRACT

Fire departments nationwide are facing large turnovers at the upper executive levels due to an increasing number of retiring senior staff personnel. A workforce planning method known as mentoring is one approach that can assist in preparing future executive level officers. The problem prompting this project was the Virginia Beach Fire Department (VBFD) did not have a formal mentoring program to prepare upcoming executive level officers.

The purpose of this applied research project was to examine what other fire departments; diverse organizations both public and private; and academic theories suggest to formalize a mentoring process for future leaders. A descriptive research methodology was employed to answer the following questions:

1. What is mentoring, and how does it apply to the executive levels of the fire service?

2. What benefits can be expected from a formalized mentoring program?

3. What are the elements of an effective mentoring process?

4. How can a mentoring program be employed by the VBFD to facilitate organizational learning at upper staff levels?

The procedures used to complete this research included a literature review, a series of semi-structured telephone surveys, and a survey of all executive level officers within the VBFD. The emphasis involved application of the many different meanings, benefits, and elements of an effective mentoring program to the executive levels of the VBFD.

The results showed the needs and opportunities for the VBFD to implement a formal mentoring program aimed at the executive level of the organization. It was determined that the

department climate would support such a program as a means to pass organizational knowledge onto the next generation of senior officers.

Utilizing the Change Management Model, recommendations were made to guide the VBFD through the development and implementation of an executive mentoring program. The retiring workforce coupled with many other department priorities, supported the need to move such a program up on the priority list. By appointing a program manager and communicating the value of the program throughout the organization, visible support from executive levels would be seen. The people within the VBFD would become the focus of the process, as the program is evaluated and refined until it becomes part of the culture of the VBFD.

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INTRODUCTION

The Virginia Beach Fire Department (VBFD) was established in September of 1925, as a small volunteer organization formed to protect the resort town of Virginia Beach. The first career Fire Chief was hired in September, 1971 (Grube, 1994). This modern era began a process by which the city would grow the department to its present day capacity of nearly 400 personnel; delivering fire and emergency medical services over 310 square miles, with twenty engine companies and five ladder companies to the most populous city in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

During the middle to late 1970's the department grew rapidly, as the city developed into a major tourist attraction and a military hub serving the Mid-Atlantic region. With this growth, the VBFD hired many new firefighters to staff its growing number of stations throughout the city. Many of the firefighters that were hired in the late 1970's have risen through the ranks and are currently in the senior management positions. These Chief Officers initially hired as 19 or 20 year old firefighters, are now in the twilight of their careers as District or Deputy Chiefs.

In the next one to five years the majority of the senior level staff of the organization will turnover as a result of the rapid expansion and growth that was realized in the 1970's. This has the potential to leave the organization with a serious leadership void. One of the issues of national importance discussed during the Wingspread Conference (1996), held by the International Association of Fire Chiefs in Dothan, Alabama was leadership. It was felt by this group that in order to transition successfully into the future, the fire service needs leaders that are capable of managing in dramatically changed environments. In order to accomplish this goal, current middle managers must acquire the necessary skills to succeed at the higher levels of the

organization. A workforce planning method known as mentoring is one approach that can assist in preparing future executive level managers (Bronfman, Taska, Taylor, 2000).

The problem that precipitated this research project is that the Virginia Beach Fire Department is going to experience a large turnover at the executive levels of the organization and there is not a formalized mentoring process to assist in preparing future executive level leaders. The department has instituted a mentoring program for volunteer firefighters, where the new firefighter is formally assigned to an engine company captain to ensure competent learning occurs. Throughout the organization, some levels of mentoring are being employed by individuals on their own, but there is not a formal effort, established by the department, to develop the skill sets of those preparing to move into the upper levels of the organization.

The purpose of this applied research project was to examine what other fire departments; diverse organizations both public and private; and academic theories suggest to formalize a mentoring process for future leaders. A descriptive research methodology was employed to answer the following questions:

- What is mentoring, and how does it apply to the executive levels of the fire service?
- What benefits can be expected from a formalized mentoring program?
- What are the elements of an effective mentoring process?
- How can a mentoring program be employed by the VBFD to facilitate organizational learning at upper staff levels?

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

The VBFD, like many organizations, is facing major personnel changes as the department progresses into the future. There will be a significant turnover in the executive level ranks in the next 1 to 5 years. This process will have a great impact on the department, as all upper staff officers retire and the current mid-level officers advance into the executive level positions. The transition leaves the organization with a potential critical shortage of top leaders in the next five years. This situation has been likened to the year 2000 computer crisis by one author (Byham, 1999). One key to remedy this situation is early planning, which is a lesson learned while dealing with the millennium crisis. Another key to surviving this transition lies in how well present leaders support the future leaders by leaving them with the tools necessary to succeed in the future.

As discussed by William Byham, CEO of Development Dimensions International, a global human resources consulting firm; "The leadership gap will bedevil the corporate world for decades to come" (Grossman, 2000, p.2). His firm surveyed 150 fortune 500 companies and the average company expects 33 percent turnover at the executive ranks in the next five years. One-third of the respondents indicated that they are not confident that suitable replacements could be found for their executive officers (Grossman, 1999).

There are several contributing factors that have led to the present situation. Downsizing, budget cuts, early retirements, and reorganizations; coupled with little turnover at the executive ranks over the past 10 years have created a watershed type event with little planning concentrating on solutions. With the exception of the Fire Chief, who was appointed in August of 1998, personnel holding positions at the upper levels of the VBFD have remained the same for

the last 10 to 15 years. When the department had one of the two Deputy Chiefs retire in the late

1980's, no replacement was put in place. These key positions have been "locked-up" for long

periods of time. This has led to personnel at the middle and lower ranks not preparing themselves

for the opportunities that lie ahead. As all organizations, public and private have experienced

over the past several years, budget cuts and downsizing have contributed to the upper level

managers having little time to devote to training upcoming replacements. Most executives are

busy attempting to keep their organizations moving and solvent in an ever changing environment.

As the fire service and other organizations struggle to find solutions for the preparation of

future leaders, the mentoring process appears to be one that has many benefits to the organization.

 Instead of feeling that they are on their own, future leaders have the opportunity to discuss issues

with other, more experienced managers in a safe environment, free from negative implications.

The personnel preparing to fill the executive roles get the chance to learn in a non-threatening

setting. This interaction augments the development process. As pointed out in a recent news

article, mentoring draws on the experiences of seasoned employees. It is a way for those who

have learned by the seat of their pants to help by showing others the way (Kowlessar, 2000). The

mentors benefit from knowing they assisted in leaving the organization in better shape than it was

when they arrived (M.R. Mathias, personal contact, July 13, 2000).

Formal mentoring programs are all but non-existent in the fire service. Through the

research conducted for this project, it was evident that mentoring future leaders was on the minds

of fire executives; but little action was being implemented. With the level of change facing the

fire service, the mentoring process can bring stability to the organization. The process helps

employees adapt and remain productive in the face of change, as well as cope with job-related stress by providing career development and psychosocial assistance and therefore may allow them to function normally (McShulskis, 1997).

This process of growing future leaders is important to all organizations, especially the VBFD; as the transition for the future is taking place. There needs to be a way for organizational knowledge to be passed to the rising leaders. In a November, 1999 survey conducted on 300 information executives; 78 percent said that inculcating leadership in their staffs was their most important job. More than half of the respondents said they did not spend enough time on it (Blodgett, 1999). The fire department needs to realize the importance of this growth process and submit the required resources towards program development.

This applied research project was completed to satisfy the stipulations of the *Strategic Management of Change* course which is a core requirement of the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer Program. The problem addressed by this project directly relates to module three of the course dealing with the management of change. This module of instruction outlined the importance of the fire service leading change instead of reacting to change. It also highlighted the need to move beyond an established comfort zone and develop a clear vision of the future. These issues, coupled with solid strategic direction and communication can lead to the development of a formalized mentoring process that can prove beneficial for the VBFD and other municipal departments.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review was conducted to analyze current documentation relevant to

formalized mentoring processes. Specifically, the review focused on procedures that address the

upper management levels of organizations. These subject areas included; defining mentoring and

its relevance to preparation of future leaders in the fire service, the benefits of mentoring

programs, the elements of an effective program, and ways to apply mentoring to executive level

learning in the fire department. The literature review involved searches of fire service related

articles, organizational theory college textbooks**,** and public and private sector writings on the

subject of mentoring and its benefits to organizations.

The Concept of Mentoring

The term "mentor" originates from ancient Greece where Odysseus, King of Ithica,

entrusted his friend and trusted advisor, Mentor with the education, care, and raising of his son,

Telemachus. Mentor provided leadership, guidance, and protection, which helped the young boy

thrive (Austin,1997; Otto,1999). According to Bramblette (1996), mentoring has roots that date

back to the ancient civilizations in Mesopotamia and other areas of the Far East. Preparation of

future generations was accomplished by passing on knowledge through different means of

tutelage and learning experiences in many different types of societal roles. This concept ensured

that civilizations could ensure that their culture would survive (Otto,1999). These same

principles have applied to the tradition of firefighting and emergency response in many different

forms, as the craft has been handed down from generation to generation (Bramblette, 1996).

Otto (1999) and Andrew (1996) describe the classical mentoring relationship as a close,

intense, mutually beneficial personal connection between a person that is usually older and wiser,

with more experience and a usually younger less experienced. Typically, the older individual has

more power within the agency, which aids in the development and growth of practical

professional and personal skills of the understudy (Otto,1999).   Andrew (1996) suggests that

mentoring has strong similarities to parenting as the younger individual is gradually transitioned

into the adulthood of his or her profession.

The Women's Business Development Center (1997) uses the term mentoring to describe a

teacher-student relationship. In the business world, mentoring occurs when a more experienced

professional (mentor) gives significant career assistance to the less-experienced professional

(mentee). The U.S. Department of Transportation (2000) describes the mentoring process as

linking an experienced person with a less experienced person to help facilitate personal and

professional growth in an individual by sharing the knowledge and insights that have been

learned through the years. This strategy facilitates comprehensive growth and development.

Mentoring programs help develop individuals by providing specific job instruction, disseminating

organizational norms and values, dispelling organizational myths, and transferring knowledge

gained through years of being part of a particular organization (Ivancevich & Matteson, 1996).

The mentoring process has been utilized by many emergency services organizations at the

entry level, over the past several years. The Novato, CA Fire Protection District has a mentoring

program to guide employees through the good and bad times of their career. Meston (1990)

indicates the Novato program allows the protégé to work on skills and build confidence, learning

"street smarts" that can make a difference in an emergency situation. Spokane, Washington has

developed a mentoring program to speak to the needs of its new recruits. The recruits are paired

with senior personnel to get them accustomed to station life, discuss management philosophies,

push continued learning, and answer any questions (Inman, 1999).

Many large American corporations utilize mentoring programs to assist in the development of senior level managers. Just a few include: AT&T, Merrill Lynch, Federal Express, General Motors, J.C. Penney, DuPont. Over the past few years there has been an explosion of formal mentoring programs. According to Jossi (1997), the percentage of businesses planning mentoring programs doubled between 1995 and 1996.

Even though corporate America has seen the need and instituted formal mentoring programs for senior employees, the fire service has been slower to implement this process. Throughout the research process for this project, information relating to mentoring programs involving executive level personnel in the fire service was minimal. Several previous Executive Fire Officer Program (EFOP) participants, Rightenour (1996), Austin (1997), and Stilp (1999) indicated there was a lack of published information within the fire service community on the subject of formal mentoring programs. This fact highlights the need for the fire service to adapt a corporate mentoring program to the needs of its senior level officers.

Benefits of Formalized Mentoring Programs

The U.S. Department of Transportation (2000) utilizes mentoring as a strategy for comprehensive growth and development. Grant and Hoover (1994) indicate mentoing programs benefit the organization as well as those that participate in the process. Several corporate sources believe these programs are a two-way street; it is a cost effective way to supply training to a new generation of leaders, and it assists older managers learn new skills (Jossi, 1997). Previous EFOP research (Ziesemer,1989; Rightenour,1996) indicates that formal mentor programs benefit the organization, the mentor and the mentee as organizational knowledge is transferred and leveraged

throughout the entire agency.

According to Margo Murray, a consultant in Oakland, California; mentoring is an inexpensive way for organizations achieve a number of goals. These include: creating future leaders, improving management and staff relationships, meeting diversity objectives, and replacing an aging workforce while developing a line of succession (Jossi, 1997). There are other benefits to the organization such as preserving institutional memory and cultural cohesion (Handfield-Jones, 2000). Meston (1990) writes about mentoring programs being a natural extension of training and education programs as the department's visions and values are taught to those coming up in the agency. The U.S. Small Business Administration (2000) indicates that mentoring is a valued method to assist minorities with development of skills by learning from others, like themselves, that have had similar experiences. The Department of Transportation (2000) benefits from mentoring programs improving: communication, leadership, motivation and morale, recruitment and retention, and work force capability, while energizing organizational culture. Ivancevich and Matteson (1996) highlight a number of positive benefits to the organization as outcomes of mentoring programs. These include: a) early identification of talent that might otherwise go unnoticed, b) sensing by mentors of employee attitudes and morale, and c) transmission of informal organizational expectations (corporate culture).

The individual being mentored is known as the protégé or mentee. According to Linda Phillips-Jones, Ph.D., a licensed psychologist and consultant; the terminology has changed over time and the preferred term today is mentee (Otto, 1999). The mentee is the benefactor of the efforts of the organization and the mentor, as the transfer of knowledge takes place. This person relies on the experience of the mentor to assist her in the growing process within the organization.

This mechanism assists the mentee in learning practical professional and personal skills (Otto, 1999). Kowlesssar (2000) suggests the mentee is given guidance in order to help them address techniques, politics, ethics, and organizational norms within a given agency. All of this is an effort to support and facilitate the growth and development of the mentee in the realization of his "dream" (Andrew, 1996). The U.S. Department of Transportation (2000) cites several benefits of their mentoring program for the mentee. They include: direction for personal growth, clarification of career goals, reference for problem analysis, feedback on growth progress, and a source of growth information. Finally, executives need to learn their craft from highly skilled colleagues as well as superiors (Handfield-Jones, 2000).

The term mentor is used to describe thousands of people who have shared their experiences, expertise and wisdom with others (Lightly, 2000). As suggested by Andrew (1996), the mentor serves in much the same capacity as a parent. This gives the mentor a great sense of pride and accomplishment as the mentee realizes some of his dreams and goals. Like parenting, the mentor lives on through the actions and achievements of the mentee. The mentor offers advice, while assisting with issues and problems; thus acting as a role model (Grant & Hoover, 1994). In addition to the self-actualization that occurs as a result of being a mentor, one can utilize the process to help learn more about what is happening at the other levels within the organization. Jossi (1997) discusses that at DuPont for example, one mentor not only gets the chance to share what he has learned; the mentor gets the opportunity to discover how the corporate level decisions are received by the troops. This DuPont executive indicates his mentee gives him an idea of what people are understanding and how people are processing corporate direction. In addition, mentors benefit from modeling leadership principles they believe in, by

passing on their knowledge and insights, by increasing their personal growth–"by teaching, you learn", and by having the opportunity to review previously learned management/organizational concepts (U.S. Department of Transportation, 2000).

Elements of a Mentoring Program

As organizations begin the thoughts of organizing a mentoring program, there has to be a commitment from the department allocating the necessary resources to the program. The support of top officials and the target audience is necessary (Phillips-Jones, 1998). As discussed by Figura (2000), one of the key competitive differences in the next century will be the people within organizations. She goes on to say that personnel matters deserve the same level of attention that financial, performance, and information technology management have received in recent years. At its most basic level, mentorship is about teaching, the leadership of the organization must be willing to expend the necessary time and human resources in order for a program to take hold (Mitchell, 1998). Phillips-Jones (1998) suggests that the organizational climate should be healthy and people have a genuine interest in developing and learning. The time required for mentors and mentees to meet and work on development activities is made available by the agency.

Programs should have a dedicated individual assigned to manage the mentoring process (Coley, 1996; Stilp, 1999). One source (Phillips-Jones, 1998) even suggests creating a task force to set up the parameters and develop the program. Coley (1996) indicates that the program manager is the coordinating element between all of the necessary parties. The manager educates all levels of management to promote better understanding of the program, as well as their involvement and commitment. Figura (2000) suggests that the manager of the program should have background experience in human resources management. Most larger organizations either

have this function within their structure, or they have the resource available to them.

The next element required for a formal mentoring program is the mentor. The organization must have enough leaders committed to pushing the program. As Mitchell (1998) recommends, mentorship is the ability to transfer skills and knowledge, while encouraging others to reach beyond previously assumed limits of understanding, perspective, and will. Another author (Geiger, 1992) cites seven role descriptions for mentors utilized by the Douglas Aircraft mentoring program. They are: communicator, counselor, coach, advisor, broker, referral agent, and advocate. Along these same lines, Kaye and Jocobson (1995) indicate that good mentors are leaders that serve in five categories: guide, ally, catalyst, savvy insider, and advocate. Starcevich (1999) believes that mentors focus on another person giving career support while enhancing individual growth and maturity. He likens a mentor to a sounding board, they give advice, but the mentee is free to make their own choice. The Women's Business Development Center (2000) indicates that mentors are wise and trusted counselors for protégés. A mentor's knowledge, experience, tenacity, and skills offer the growing mentee guidance, advice, and training. However, even though the mentor attempts to steer the individual in the right direction to reach her potential, the mentee must rely on herself to succeed. Otto (1999) has several recommendations for mentors: a) make sure you can devote sufficient time to your mentee - at least an hour once or twice a month - before entering into a mentoring relationship; b) listen closely to the mentee's goals and ambitions; c) ask thoughtful questions such as "What do you like about your job?" and "What do you find troublesome?"; d) allow opportunities for dialogue and feedback; e) maintain a sense of confidentiality; f) be willing to admit past failures so that others may learn from your mistakes; g) open doors by introducing mentees to other senior

executives and by involving them in projects; and h) don't become too fond of the advice dispensed - mentees may choose to follow a different direction.

Another key element of a formal mentoring program is the mentee or protégé. Kaye and Jacobson (1995) believe that mentees should take a more active role in their own development. This is further substantiated by the Women's Business Development Center (2000) by suggesting the protégé shape the overall agenda for the relationship by knowing what you want. There are several roles and responsibilities required of the mentee discussed by the Women's Business Development Center (2000), Geiger- DuMond and Boyle (1995), and Kaye and Jacobson (1995). First, establish realistic and attainable expectations in order to get the most from the relationship. Next, be responsible to meet and discuss experiences, share information, and discuss feedback. This includes being prepared, so the mentor's time is not wasted. Third, keep the relationship on a professional level by not getting too personnel throughout the process. Next, be responsible to undertake and follow through with different learning assignments. Be willing to learn through temporary organizational assignments, special projects, and job rotations. Also, do not expect the mentor to be an expert in each and every facet of the business. Sixth, do not be overly sensitive to criticism, as it is only offered to assist in growing and understanding. Also, be aware that nothing lasts forever and be willing to cease the relationship at the appropriate time. Finally, trust is the most important bond between the mentor and mentee. Work to keep trust in place through the relationship, because once it is broken, so is the relationship.

The final ingredient of a formalized mentoring program is the matching process between the mentor and the mentee. This is no easy job according to Schneider (2000), as executives work today a mind-boggling pace of competition. This hinders the attempt to mentor, as senior

managers are very busy just trying to survive. Douglas Aircraft Company in Long Beach,

California, has a process in place for management development with a mentoring program. The

program identifies high-performance employees that are introduced to the mentoring process as

a way to help define development objectives. Then the company matches the high performers

with executives who can help them meet their objectives. Together, the mentor and mentee

determine the goals for the mentoring relationship (Geiger-DuMond and Boyle, 1995).

The matching process can deteriorate on many fronts that are founded on the roles and

responsibilities of the mentor and mentee discussed earlier in this section of the project.

Mentoring requires personal commitment more than written rules (Meston, 1990). Geiger (1992)

makes it clear that not all mentoring matches work out. The typical mentoring relationship

usually lasts two to ten years, and it often times ends in conflict (Moskowitz, 1995). Both parties

need to know what they can and cannot expect from the mentoring process, as it works best when

both participants bring something to the table (Schneider, 2000).

Employing a Mentoring Program

The first step in getting a mentoring program off the ground is to secure the support of the

top officials of the organization (Phillips-Jones, 1998). Douglas Aircraft has two important

elements that establish mentoring as an integeral part of the corporate culture. First, there is

visible, frequent, and continuing support from senior management. Second, mentoring is part of

the long-term strategic plan published by the Chief Executive Officer of the company (Geiger-

DuMond and Boyle, 1995). The next step involves selling the program to all levels of the

organization through proper communication and educational processes. Share the benefits of the

program with not only the labor of the organization (Meston, 1990), but with all levels throughout

the agency (Phillips-Jones, 1998). This can be accomplished by highlighting the healthy climate present in the department; business is good and people are interested in learning and developing.

Recognizing the need for the program is another key step in the process. This program involves people, so the organization must connect the individual values of the person with those organizational values that support continued management development processes. Success is based on professional growth and organizational transformation through a value system (Meston, 1990). Figura (2000) supports this notion as she discusses the many agencies that failed to plan and develop future executives, resulting in a shortage of necessary skill sets at the upper management positions.

Managing the barriers to the program will also prove to be a key element. The National Academy of Public Administration (2000) discusses several barriers to growing leaders in the public sector including:

- · organizational culture

- · low priority given by senior officials

- · insufficient resources

- · inadequate rewards for initiative/risk

- · limited mobility

- · lack of role models

These barriers must first be recognized and then they must be managed in order for a mentoring program to be successful.

Getting started now on an initiative is important according to Moskowitz (1995). He cites the need to get the inertia moving with mentoring. Even senior executives can utilize the benefits

of a mentoring process as they have reflective discussions about their work. Start small and develop the program, possibly utilizing new hires or budding leaders as good targets. Also, do not re-invent the wheel. Good materials for program design and training are out there; also consider bringing in a consultant (Phillips-Jones, 1998).

<u>Literature Review Summary</u>

The literature review provided insights and concepts of others from the public and private sector relating to the mentoring process. There were many examples of plans and definitions from organizations outside the fire service. Although there have been articles and programs developed focusing on mentoring new employees within the fire service; there have been only a few items written concentrating on executive levels of the fire service. This emphasizes the fact that such a program would be a fairly new concept for the fire organization.

Mentoring has roots that trace back to ancient civilizations. An outcome of the literature review indicates there is not a single definition of mentoring. It has different meanings to those concerned, such as a student-teacher relationship, or a parenting type of relationship. Most of the authors did indicate the mentoring process revolved around developing the individual and passing on organizational knowledge. Other findings included the benefits of a mentoring program to the organization and those involved, the elements of effective mentoring programs, and how a mentoring program may be utilized for the executive levels of the fire department.

PROCEDURES

This research project utilized a descriptive research methodology to examine the many

different meanings, benefits, and elements of an effective mentoring program. The emphasis

involved application of this learning to the executive levels of the VBFD. The procedures used to

complete this research included a literature review, a series of semi-structured telephone surveys,

and a survey of all executive level officers within the VBFD.

Literature Review

A literature review was conducted through the Learning Resource Center at the National

Fire Academy during April of 2000. Additional literature reviews were conducted from May

through July, 2000 at the Virginia Beach Public Library, the City of Virginia Beach Municipal

Reference Library, the Old Dominion University Library, and the Internet.

The review of materials highlighted articles and books that focused on mentoring

programs in public and private organizations. The intention was to discover programs and

materials that could be adapted to the fire service; specifically the executive levels. The sources

that applied to the research questions and intent of this project were discussed and summarized in

the literature review section of this report.

Surveys

A survey was developed to evaluate the emphasis the senior managers of the VBFD place

on the mentoring process. The senior chief officers were selected because they will have the

authority to institute such a program, if it is deemed necessary. As well, these executive officers

are the emphasis of this applied research project. They are the key members of the organization

that will be leaving in the upcoming years, and they must decide if a mentoring process would

prove worthwhile for the VBFD.

The internal survey was sent to an outside executive and an inside senior level manager in a draft format. The confusing, ambiguous, and redundant items were adjusted and the final draft of the survey was completed. The surveys were placed in sealed envelopes and dispersed utilizing the department internal mail system. The officers surveyed were as follows: the fire chief, the deputy chief, and 5 district chiefs. All officers responded, therefore the return rate of the survey was 100 percent. The survey was structured to extract the opinions and intentions of the officers concerning: (a) a time frame for their possible departure from the organization; (b) readiness of junior officers to move up; (c) the importance they place on such a program; (d) their exposure to a mentor; (e) the value of a mentoring program; and (f) the focus areas of a mentoring process. A copy of the survey can be found in Appendix A and a summarization of the surveys can be found in the results section of this project.

An external telephone survey was also developed and delivered to individuals from ten metropolitan sized fire departments across the United States that were similar demographically to the VBFD. The departments were randomly selected utilizing the national Directory of Fire Chiefs and EMS Administrators, 2000 edition. A telephone survey was chosen in an effort to provide additional information to the respondents, as needed, and maintain better control over the survey process. The intent of the external survey was to compare the VBFD to other fire departments in terms of percentage of retiring senior officers, preparation of mid-level managers, whether or not a mentoring program was in place, and if they felt a process was beneficial. A copy of the survey can be found in Appendix B and a summarization of the surveys can be found in the results section of this project. Appendix C contains a table with the external survey results.

Assumptions and Limitations

There were several assumptions made concerning the procedures section of this research project. First, it was assumed that the authors of the reviewed materials performed accurate initial research. Next, the conclusion was made that the respondents answered the research surveys objectively. Third, it was assumed that the representatives of the external fire departments surveyed were qualified to answer the questions and they did so completely to the best of their knowledge. Finally, it was assumed that the respondents did not discuss the survey process prior to providing their information.

There were also several areas limiting the research. First, there is no formal definition of the mentoring process that is utilized throughout the public and private sectors. Different organizations utilize different methods depending upon their specific needs. Second, the literature reviewed contained little information and examples that are specific to the fire service. Third, was designing a telephone survey that could extract the needed information from the respondents in a short time frame; as executive level officers a very busy. Fourth, is the time factor imposed by the Executive Fire Officer Program for completion. This factor did not allow for a more thorough review of the available literature on the subject; nor did it allow enough time to implement and evaluate a mentoring process over a period of time.

RESULTS

1.   What is mentoring, and how does it apply to the executive levels of the fire service?

The term "mentor" has roots that date back to ancient Greece, as Odysseus, King of Ithica, entrusted his friend to raise his son(Austin, 1997; Otto, 1999). Several authors, Otto (1999), Andrew (1996), and Bramblette (1996) describe the classical mentoring process as a close, intense, mutually beneficial personal connection between an older, more experienced individual and a usually younger, less experienced individual. The Women's Business Development Center (1997) uses the term mentoring to describe a teacher-student relationship. The mentor serves in much the same capacity as a parent throughout a given time frame in the career of an individual (Andrew, 1996).

Many large American corporations utilize mentoring programs to assist in the development of senior level managers. Just a few include: AT&T, Merrill Lynch, Federal Express, General Motors, J.C. Penney, DuPont. Over the past few years there has been an explosion of formal mentoring programs. According to Jossi (1997), the percentage of businesses planning mentoring programs doubled between 1995 and 1996.

Several fire service organizations such as Novato, Califirnia and Spokane, Washington have mentoring programs in place to address their new employees. The VBFD has a program in place that pairs new volunteer firefighters with engine company captains, but there was little evidence of formal mentoring programs being applied to the executive levels of the fire department. Several EFOP participants have substantiated the fact that there is a lack of information on this subject (Rightenour, 1996; Austin, 1997; Stilp, 1999).

There are those that indicate a mentoring process can be borrowed and adapted to any

organization (Phillips-Jones, 1998; Moskowitz, 1995). This would support the notion that a formal mentoring program could be developed for the executive levels of the fire department. Stilp (1999) agrees by indicating that a program should be started in the Orlando, Florida fire department.

The external surveys indicated that 70 percent of the fire departments surveyed will have a 50 percent turnover in the executive ranks in the next two to five years. This coupled with the fact that 100 percent of the external respondents do not have a formal mentoring program in place for their rising executive officers, substantiates the need and application of such a program.

2.   What benefits can be expected from a formalized mentoring program?

Research conducted indicates that formalized mentoring programs benefit the organization as well as those that participate in the process (Grant and Hoover, 1994). Andrew (1996) concludes that the individual serving as a mentor in the mentoring process realizes a great sense of pride and accomplishment as the mentee realizes their goals and dreams. The mentee is the benefactor of the efforts of the mentor and the organization as the transfer of knowledge takes place. There are several organizations that utilize mentoring programs for comprehensive growth and development; such as the U.S. Department of Transportation and Boeing Aircraft. Jossi (1997) indicated that mentoring programs are an inexpensive way to achieve goals such as creating future leaders, improving management and staff relationships, meeting diversity objectives, and replacing an aging workforce. The U.S. Department of Transportation (2000) indicates their mentoring program improves communication, leadership, motivation and morale, recruitment and retention, work force capability, and organizational culture.

Question #3 of the VBFD internal survey asked if the chief officers felt a mentoring

program was important to prepare middle managers for executive positions. All of the

respondents indicated "yes". Also, question #5 asked the respondents if they felt a mentoring

program had a value for their career. All those surveyed felt mentoring either did or would have

provided value in their job life. The external department surveys substantiated this finding, as 80

percent of the respondents agreed that a formal mentoring program would be a benefit to their

organization.

     3.   What are the elements of an effective mentoring program?

The research for this question focused upon the writing of the authors in the literature

review, as no fire departments surveyed had a formal mentoring program in place. Question #3 of

the external department survey asked if the respondent's organization had a mentoring process in

place to prepare mid-level managers for senior positions. All of the respondents answered "no" to

this question.

Phillips-Jones (1998) indicated that when an organization begins to organize a mentoring

program, the support of top officials is necessary. The organization must be willing to expend the

necessary time and human resources on the program so that it will take hold in the agency

(Mitchell, 1998). The next element is a program manager. Programs should have a designated

individual assigned to manage the mentoring process (Coley, 1996; Stilp, 1999). A group of

people willing to become mentors is also necessary. Several authors describe many desirable

traits that a mentor should bring to the process. These include: advisor, coach, counselor, broker,

referral agent, advocate, guide, ally, and savvy insider, just to name a few (Geiger, 1992; Kaye &

Jacobson, 1995; Mitchell, 1998). The mentee or protégé is the next required element. The

organization must have personnel that are willing to grow through the mentoring process. Kaye

and Jacobson (1995) indicate that mentees who are willing to control their own destiny by making career plans and searching out mentors will greatly benefit from the experience. The process that brings the mentor and mentee together is the final element. According to Schneider (2000), this is not an easy job. Douglas Aircraft Company has a program that matches high-performance employees with executives that can help them meet their career objectives (Geiger-DuMond & Boyle, 1995). Meston (1990) and Moskowitz (1995) concur that not all mentoring matches work out. A high amount of personal commitment is required on the part of both parties. Also, much of the time the mentee outgrows the abilities of the mentor.

    4.   How can a mentoring program be employed by the VBFD to facilitate

        organizational learning at the executive levels?

One of the first steps of employing a mentoring program is recognizing the need for such a program. Meston (1990) points out the program must be valued by the organization. In addition, the program must have visible, continuing support from the senior management levels of the organization. Along with this, the process should be a part of the strategic plan for the agency (Geiger-DuMond & Boyle, 1995). Phillips-Jones(1998) also suggests selling the program to the members of the organization. There has to be an interest generated concerning the effort. The barriers to the success of the program must be identified and managed, according to the National Academy of Public Administration(2000). Moskowitz(1995) and Phillips-Jones(1998) indicate the organization has to just decide to get started with the process. This can be accomplished by beginning small, utilizing components of other agencies processes, until the organization can fine tune their own program.

The surveys of the internal and external organizations completed for this project would

indicate the organizational climate is right in the fire service to begin looking at formal mentoring programs for senior level employees. The surveys indicate 71.4 percent of the VBFD senior management and 70 percent of departments nationwide will experience a turnover rate greater than 50 percent in their executive level ranks in the next two to five years. None of the departments surveyed had a formal program in place. While the external organizations felt they had a mid-level ready to move into senior positions (80 percent), only 28.5 percent of the the VBFD executives felt that their middle managers were ready to progress into the senior levels of the organization. These factors seem to support the development of a mentoring process for executive levels of the fire service. When asked to select areas that should be highlighted by a process, the VBFD officers indicated the areas of most to least importance were: personnel management, human resource development, budgeting and finance, political, educational, and operational. This seems to indicate the shift from operations to human resource management is occurring within the organization, which is a previous factor mentioned in relation to the right climate to start a mentoring program.

DISCUSSION

The research completed for this project indicates that like many organizations, the fire service will experience large turnover at the executive levels in the next five years. Byham (1999) indicates that a significant number of large, older organizations will see 40 to 50 percent of their executives leave in the next five years. This was substantiated by a survey process for the VBFD and similar fire organizations across the United States. The internal survey information indicates the VBFD will see 71.4 percent of its senior level executives leave in the next five

years. Of the ten fire departments surveyed across the nation, 70 percent expect a turnover rate of 50 percent at the senior levels in the next five years.

A formal mentoring program, focused on the executive level of the organization can provide benefits to the organization, as well as the participants; according to Grant and Hoover (1994). Otto (1999) indicates that more and more companies are utilizing mentoring as a means to ensure that their corporate cultures will survive and prosper. This research, along with the internal and external survey results, indicate most organizations see strong benefits to a formal mentoring process that is focused on preparing future executive level personnel.

There is no formal process within the VBFD to capture and pass along the organizational knowledge to the upcoming leaders of the organization. This fact was substantiated by every external organization surveyed for this project. None of the external departments have a formal process in place to pass on organizational knowledge. There is a workforce planning method known as mentoring that is one approach that can assist in the preparation of future executive level managers (Bronfman, et al., 2000). Many large corporations such as AT&T, Federal Express, and DuPont have instituted formal mentoring programs in their organizations to develop future executives (Jossi, 1997). The fire service has been slow to implement this type of process as pointed out by EFOP participants Rightenour (1996), Austin (1997), and Stilp (1999). All internal and external respondents agreed that a formal mentoring program would benefit the fire service.

There is some disparity between the level of confidence external organizations have in their mid-level managers and the level of confidence the VBFD officers have in their middle managers. Eighty percent of the external organizations felt their mid-level supervisors were

ready to take the step to senior management, while only 28.5 percent of the VBFD senior

executives feel their mid-managers are ready. This would seen to indicate that there is a need for

development in this area for the VBFD. All of the internal survey respondents agreed that a

mentoring process to prepare future executive level officers is important. This coupled with the

fact that 71.4 percent of the internal respondents were exposed to an informal mentoring process,

would indicate that the organizational climate is right for progressing in this area. This coincides

with the writings of Phillips-Jones (1998) as key areas to indicate a more formal mentoring

program would take root in the organization.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A formal mentoring process focused on the current mid-level managers who are aspiring

to progress to the executive ranks of the organization, would be beneficial to the VBFD.

Recommendations to develop and implement such a formalized process are a result of the

analysis accomplished for this applied research project. The recommendations should be

accomplished utilizing the Change Management Model, introduced in the Executive Fire Officer

Course, *Strategic Management of Change*.

The first phase would include analyzing the organizational change requirements based

upon the needs of the organization and the results of the findings in this research project. There

are many areas to consider. Over seventy percent of the upper level managers of the department

will be retiring in the next 2 to 5 years. This cycle is occurring not only in the fire service, but

organizations nationwide are experiencing the same issue. Competition for workers and

managers from other organizations is becoming fierce as the pool of talented managers is

shrinking. Lack of time and commitment from current senior executives puts planning for a mentoring process on the back burner. Insufficient resources also hinders the development process. All of these potential destabilizing forces must be analyzed and the organization must decide to commit to making the changes necessary to enact the program.

The next phase would encompass the needs to develop plans to deal with the required changes. Again, there are several areas to consider. One of the most important pillars will be the support of key senior staff members. Without their buy-in, a mentoring program will not materialize. There should be a group of employees tasked to develop the program; in addition there should be a program manager appointed to the program. There are many mentoring programs in place in organizations across the country that could be studied and modified to fit the needs of the VBFD. This should become a priority for the agency. A key finding in the research was that none of the respondents in the survey had a formal mentoring program in place in their fire departments. The research also indicated the senior officers of the VBFD supported the need for such a program.

The third phase includes the requirements needed to implement the mentoring program. The internal department surveys indicate that all of the executive officers of the VBFD feel a mentoring program would be beneficial. This fact, coupled with the fact that over 70 percent of the internal respondents have been informally mentored throughout their careers, sets the stage for implementation. Teaming seasoned officers with more junior officers would certainly enhance an environment of shared vision and common direction. The process must be effectively communicated through the entire organization. There needs to be strong support from the fire chief and all of the executive level personnel, this will send the right message to the operating

core personnel. The sense of urgency for the program has been established by the fact that 80 percent of the external respondents felt their mid-level managers were ready for the next step, while the internal respondents felt only 28.5 percent of the mid-managers in the VBFD were ready. It seems that the VBFD has much to accomplish in this area. The mentoring program for these officers should become a part of the strategic plan for the organization.

The final phase should institutionalize and evaluate the mentoring process as it is incorporated into the organization. Modifications must be made to ensure the organization and the program participants are getting the full benefits of the program. The focus areas highlighted by the current senior managers in the survey indicate a shift in organizational priorities is occurring. Personnel management, human resource development, and budget issues were rated as needing the most development in future senior managers, while political, educational, and operational issues were rated much lower. This indicates a need to focus more on the people within the organization, and a shift away from operational priorities. The mentoring process for future executive officers must be continually monitored and totally supported by management. It must not only occur day-to-day, it must become part of the culture of the VBFD.

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APPENDIX A

Virginia Beach Fire Department
Senior Management Survey

The purpose of this survey is to evaluate the importance senior level Officers of the VBFD place on research issues involving mentoring process. The results of the survey will be included in an applied research project for the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer program. Your response to this survey will be anonymous. Please respond to the following questions, feel free to add any comments that you feel will contribute to the research being conducted:

1.   When do you plan on retiring from the VBFD?
          ___ 1 year   ___ 3 years   ___ 4 years
          ___ 2 years   ___ 5 years

2.   Do you feel the middle managers of this organization are prepared to replace the existing upper level managers?
          ___ Yes
          ___ No

3.   Do you think it is important for the department to have a mentoring process to prepare middle managers for executive level positions?
          ___ Yes
          ___ No

4.   Were you exposed to a mentor; either formal or informal, as you progressed through your career?
          ___ Yes   ___ Formal
          ___ No   ___ Informal

5.   Do you feel mentoring had a value if you were exposed to a mentor in your career?
          ___ Yes
          ___ No
          or
          If you were not exposed to mentoring, do you feel that it may have proved to be of value to your career?
          ___ Yes
          ___ No

6.   In your opinion, which particular management focus areas should a mentoring program concentrate on?
          ___ Operational   ___ Budgetary/Financial
          ___ Political   ___ Human Resource Development
          ___ Educational   ___ Personnel Management

APPENDIX B

External Mentoring Survey

The purpose of this survey is to evaluate the importance senior level fire service officers place on research issues involving mentoring processes. The results of this survey will be included in an applied research project for the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer Program. Your responses to this survey will be kept confidential and the author will provide you with a copy of the results if you so desire. Please respond to the following questions:

1.   What percentage of your department's senior level managers will retire within the next 2-5 years?

2.   Do you feel the mid-level managers of your organization are prepared to replace the existing upper level managers?

3.   Does your organization currently have a mentoring program in place to prepare mid-level managers for senior level positions?

4.   If no, how does your department currently prepare personnel for the senior level positions?
___ Formal Education Requirements
___ State Sponsored Training
___ Department Sponsored Training
___ Time- in- Grade Requirements

5.   Do you feel a formal mentoring program would assist your organization with preparing future senior level officers?

APPENDIX C

External Mentoring Survey Summary				
City	**Percentage of Executives Retiring 2-5 yrs**	**Middle Managers Prepared**	**Currently a Program in Place**	**Executive Mentoring Beneficial**
Charlotte, NC	80	Yes	No	No
Denver, CO	20	No	No	Yes
Indianapolis, IN	20	Yes	No	Yes
Louisville, KY	50	Yes	No	Yes
Mont., AL	55	Yes	No	Yes
Orlando, FL	75	Yes	No	Yes
Pittsburgh, PA	15	No	No	Yes
Richmond, VA	50	Yes	No	Unsure
Salt Lake, UT	70	Yes	No	Yes
Tucson, AZ	100	Yes	No	Yes