

SWOT: An Analysis of the Monroe Fire Department's Training Program

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Certification Statement

I hereby do certify that this research paper constitutes my own work and product, that where the language of others is set forth, quotation marks so indicate, and that appropriate credit is given where I have used the language, ideas, expressions, or writings of another.



Signed: _____

Date: 10/12/2017

Abstract

It was the perfect storm. The number and type of skills firefighters must train on annually continues to increase, while the number of discretionary hours volunteers have continues to decrease. Eventually something had to give, and for the Monroe Fire Department (MFD) that something was attendance at training. The problem is the MFD's training division has not conducted a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis of the training program. The purpose of the applied research project is to conduct a SWOT analysis of the MFD's training program. Action research methods were used to answer the following four questions. What are the strengths of the Monroe Fire Department's training program? What are the weaknesses of the Monroe Fire Department's training program? What opportunities exist for the Monroe Fire Department's training program? What threatens the success of the Monroe Fire Departments training program? A literature review was completed using the internet, the NFA online learning resource center, books, fire service publications, and other Executive Fire Officer (EFO) applied research projects. Nine members of the MFD conducted a SWOT analysis of the training program. The results of the SWOT analysis identified five key factors for each of the four segments, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Recommendations for the MFD include scheduling listening sessions with the membership to identify alternative formats to the training program, the allocation of funds to address the key factors identified in the SWOT analysis, expand the SWOT analysis to include the MFD's apparatus, EMS, and safety divisions, and share the SWOT analysis process with other city departments.

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Introduction

The City of Monroe is located in Green County, Wisconsin, a rural area centered along the Wisconsin – Illinois border. The Monroe Fire Department (MFD) consists of 39 paid-on-call (POC) members and 2 career members. The MFD has eight POC officers ranking from lieutenant to division chief. The Fire Chief and Deputy Fire Chief are career (full-time) members of the fire department (MFD Membership Records, 2017).

The MFD operates out of two stations protecting the City of Monroe and the rural townships of Monroe and Clarno. Total area of first due coverage represents 75 square miles and 14,000 residents. The MFD provides mutual aid to neighboring communities and states as a member of the Mutual Aid Box Alarm System (MABAS). The two fire stations are not staffed with firefighters. Members are toned out by the 911-dispatch center using a pager system. The MFD is an all hazards organization and responds to an average of 230 calls annually for fire, rescue, and other forms of assistance (MFD Incident Response Records, 2016). The MFD is trained to the emergency medical responder level. The MFD does not provide transport services.

The problem is the MFD's training division has not conducted a SWOT analysis of the training program. The purpose of the applied research project is to conduct a SWOT analysis of the MFD's training program. Action research methods were used to answer the following four questions:

1. What are the strengths of the Monroe Fire Department's training program?
2. What are the weaknesses of the Monroe Fire Department's training program?
3. What opportunities exist for the Monroe Fire Department's training program?
4. What threatens the success of the Monroe Fire Department's training program?

Background and Significance

The background to the problem relates to four issues concerning the training program, decreased attendance, increased training requirements, competing interests, and an outdated delivery model. Over the past 5 years, the MFD has seen attendance at its regular training decrease from an average of 78% to 70% , with some nights having as little as 50% of the membership in attendance (MFD Training Records, 2017).

Transitioning from a fire rescue organization to an all hazards organization has resulted in an increase of annual training hours (MFD Training Records, 2012-2016). Previously, new members of the MFD were required to complete the State of Wisconsin Firefighter 1 certification within their first 12 months. Now, new members must also complete the MFD's internal training academy within their first 12 months.

In addition, new members are now required to complete the State of Wisconsin Firefighter 2 Certification (40hrs) within 24 months of completing the Firefighter 1 certification. The new training requirements have added over 100 hours of training for new firefighters (MFD Training Records, (2012-2016).

The MFD has several special operations teams and frequently sponsors training events outside of its regular training nights. Participation on a special operations team such as the rapid intervention team, maintenance team, emergency medical response team, or in training events scheduled outside of the regular training nights are voluntary.

The additional time required to complete this training has created a situation where the members are forced to choose whether to attend training or a competing interests such as caring for elderly parents, attending children's activities, participating in hobbies, or just enjoying some personal time.

The MFD's present model for training has not adapted to the cultural changes, generational needs, or technological advancements that have occurred over the past 20 years. The MFD does not use any internet based training programs and relies solely on their instructors to develop course materials. The training program does not currently have a means for members to make-up missed training sessions.

Conducting a SWOT analysis will have a significant impact on the MFD's future in the following three ways. First, the process of conducting a SWOT analysis will bring a diverse group of members together to conduct an in depth review of the MFD's training program, something that has never been done. Second, the training division will be able to use the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats identified during the SWOT analysis to create a strategic plan to improve the training program. Third, the process used for conducting the SWOT analysis for the training program will be shared with the other divisions within the fire department as well as other departments within the city.

The applied research project relates to the Executive Leadership course goal, "*The Executive Fire Officer (EFO) will develop the ability to conceptualize and employ key processes used by effective executive-level managers in the exercise of adaptive leadership*" (Executive Leadership-Student Manual, 2015, p. vii). Using action research methods, the researcher will facilitate a SWOT analysis of the MFD's training program. Information gathered during the SWOT analysis will be used to develop a strategic plan for improving the MFD's training program. The strategic plan will include recommendations for solving technical and adaptive problems within the training program.

The applied research project is directly linked to the third goal of the United States Fire Administrations 2014-2018 strategic plan: "*Enhance the Fire and Emergency Services*'

Capability for response to and Recovery from All Hazards" (U.S. Fire Administration [FEMA], 2014, p. 12). The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats identified during the SWOT analysis will be use to implement training that will increase the MFD's effectiveness in responding to and mitigating emergency incidents.

The research is also directly linked to the fourth goal of the United States Fire Administrations 2014-2018 strategic plan: "*Advance the Professional Development of Fire Service Personnel and of Other People Engaged in Prevention & Control Activities*" (U.S. Fire Administration [FEMA], 2014, p. 13). The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats identified during the SWOT analysis will assist the training division in identifying alternative methods for members to continue their professional development.

Literature Review

The literature review for the applied research project began with a search for previous SWOT analysis conducted by the MFD's training division. The search revealed that the training division has not conducted a SWOT analysis of the training program in the past. A search of other departments within the City of Monroe also failed to produce any previous SWOT analysis. In the absence of any internal SWOT analysis to reference, the literature search was expanded to include the internet, the NFA online learning resource center, books, fire service publications, and other EFO applied research projects. The literature review focused on defining what a SWOT analysis is and how one is conducted. This information was then used to conduct a SWOT analysis of the MFD's training program.

A SWOT analysis is defined as an examination of an organization's internal strengths and weaknesses, its opportunities for growth and improvement, and the threats the external environment presents to its survival (Harrison, 2010). The SWOT analysis can be used as a risk

management tool by pairing external threats with internal weaknesses to highlight the most serious threats to the organization (Markgraf, 2017). The most important reason for conducting a SWOT analysis is to improve the viability of an organization. The SWOT analysis is a precursor to creating a strategic plan (Harrison, 2010).

A SWOT analysis has four segments: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Strengths and weaknesses look at internal influences that are or may affect the organization. Determining whether something is a strength or a weakness is not always black and white. What may be considered a strength may also be considered a weakness depending on an individual's perspective. For example, having a young work force may be seen as a strength because of the physical nature of firefighting, but the inexperience associated with youth may be seen as a weakness (Jurevicius, 2013).

Internal strengths are the knowledge, skills, abilities, and/or products/services in which an organization excels. These strengths are used to further the organization's mission. When identifying organizational strengths, think in terms of capabilities, competitive advantages, resources, assets, people, experience, knowledge, data, and capabilities. A list of organizational strengths should be able to answer (Keeley, 2017).

1. What are the unit's advantages?
2. What does the unit do well?
3. What relevant resources do you have access to?
4. What do other people see as your strengths?
5. What would you want to boast about to someone who knows nothing about the organization and its work?

Internal weaknesses are the knowledge, skills, abilities, and/or products/services in which an organization has not reached its full potential. When identifying organizational weaknesses, think in terms of disadvantages, gaps in capabilities, lack of competitive strength, reputation, financial, timescales/deadlines, morale/leadership, accreditations, and process/systems. A list of organizational weaknesses should be able to answer (Keeley, 2017).

1. What can be improved?
2. What is done poorly?
3. What should be avoided?
4. What are you doing as an organization that you feel could be done more effectively or efficiently?
5. What is the organization not doing that you feel it should be doing?
6. If you could change one thing that would help the department function more effectively, what would you change?

Opportunities are external products, services, or partners that align with the organization's mission. Factors to consider are politics, technology, economics, and society. A list of organizational opportunities should be able to answer ("Doing a S.W.O.T. analysis," 2017).

1. Can your company enter the market early to gain momentum on the competition?
2. Are there new markets opening up to you?
3. What are you doing that your competitors are not?
4. Is there complacency among your competitors?
5. What are the market, industry, and national economic trends?
6. Is the cost of technology required to operate your business decreasing?

External threats are negative attributes affecting an organization's operations. A list of organizational threats should be able to answer ("Doing a S.W.O.T. analysis," 2017).

1. Does your competitor have strong financial support?
2. Is your industry threatened by a recession?
3. What current or pending standards or regulations are or may have a negative impact on your operations?
4. Is technology threatening your operations?
5. Are you dependent on a skilled workforce?
6. What trends are developing that could make your product/service obsolete?
7. Are there any new competitors entering your market?

The SWOT analysis process is used as a guide during the strategic planning process. Internal strengths are paired with external opportunities to maximize organizational effectiveness and efficiencies. Internal weaknesses are compared to external threats to identify products or services that an organization may want to discontinue (Chand, 2017).

The literature review revealed a variety of methods for conducting a SWOT analysis. A SWOT analysis is often held during a company retreat or planning session that allows for several hours of brainstorming and analysis (McCarthy, 2015). The SWOT analysis process should involve people who are essential to the development and implementation of the organization's strategic plan ("Who to include," 2017).

The purpose of strategic planning is to bring an organization into balance with their external environment. Organizations accomplish this balance by evaluating programs and services. The SWOT analysis is the decision making tool used for maximizing organizational performance (Harrison, 2010). Distributing a pre-meeting packet that explains the purpose and

objectives of the meeting and includes recommended document sources can deepen the discussions and improve the efficiency of the SWOT analysis process (Metlapall, 2010).

The book *Essentials of Strategic Planning in Healthcare*, (Harrison, 2010), outlines four steps for conducting a SWOT analysis.

1. Collect and evaluate key data.
2. Sort the collected data into the four segments: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.
3. Develop a SWOT matrix.
4. Incorporate the SWOT analysis into the strategic planning process.

An individual or a group of people can perform a SWOT analysis. A SWOT analysis is a simple tool and can be comprised of as few as two steps: list the organizations strengths and weaknesses, identify external opportunities and threats (Jurevicius, 2013). Jurevicius (2013) shares the following guidelines for conducting a successful SWOT analysis.

1. Factors have to be identified relative to the competitors. It allows specifying whether the factor is a strength or weakness.
2. Limit each category to 3-5 items to prevent endless lists.
3. Be specific, a strong brand image (vague), a brand image valued at \$10 million (specific).
4. Rely on facts, not opinion – use internal data to back up claims.

Strengths and weaknesses are scored on their importance. Score each factor on a scale of 1-3 to indicate whether it is a major (3) or a minor (1) strength or weakness. Opportunities and threats are scored based on probability. A (1) indicates a low probability and a (3) indicates a high probability (Markgraf, 2017).

The article *Conducting a successful SWOT analysis meeting* suggests a six-step process for conducting a SWOT analysis exercise ("Conducting a successful SWOT," 2017).

1. Designate a facilitator to explain the SWOT analysis process and set ground rules for the meeting. Assign the participants to equal sized work groups.
2. Have each work group list 5-7 internal strengths.
3. Have each work group list 5-7 internal weaknesses.
4. Have each work group list 5-7 external opportunities.
5. Have each work group list 5-7 external threats.
6. Establish priorities
 - a. Sort the lists by segment: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.
 - b. Ask each participant to rank what they feel are the top five priorities for each of the SWOT segments. Those items in each segment receiving the most votes become the top five strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, or threats.

To summarize, a SWOT analysis has four segments, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. A SWOT analysis is used to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of an organization. Strengths and weaknesses are evaluated from an internal perspective while opportunities and threats are external factors that are or may influence an organization.

The SWOT analysis process should be inclusive, and can be perform in as few as two steps. Common recommendations are to identify a facilitator, set ground rules, be inclusive, be specific, and have a system for prioritizing the identified factors of each segment.

Information gathered from Dr. Keely (Keeley, 2017) and the article *Doing a SWOT Analysis for your Company* ("Doing a S.W.O.T. analysis," 2017) were used to create a list of

sample questions to guide the participants during the SWOT analysis exercise (see Appendices A, B, & C). Information gathered from the article *Conducting a Successful SWOT Analysis Meeting* ("Conducting a successful SWOT," 2017) was used to develop ground rules for the SWOT analysis exercise (see Appendix D). Information gathered from Jurevicious (2013), Harrison (2010), McCarthy (2015), and Markgraf (2017) was used to design the SWOT analysis exercise and the SWOT matrix (see Appendix F).

Procedures

The problem is the MFD's training division has not conducted a SWOT analysis of the training program. The purpose of the applied research project is to conduct a SWOT analysis of the MFD's training program. Action research methods were used to answer the following four questions:

1. What are the strengths of the Monroe Fire Department's training program?
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Nine members of the MFD participated in the SWOT analysis exercise. The nine participants represent the diversity of the MFD's membership; two members were baby boomers, four members were from generation X, and three members were from the millennial generation. In addition, two members were company officers, three members were fire instructors, and four members were firefighters. The exercise participants were knowledgeable in regards to the MFD and the fire service in general as they collectively represent over 160 years of service on the Monroe Fire Department (MFD Membership Records, 2017).

The SWOT analysis exercise was conducted offsite at a local business to limit interruptions. At the beginning of the meeting, the facilitator provided each participant with a list of ground rules and explained the objective and goals of the SWOT analysis exercise (see Appendices D & E). The term SWOT was defined, and each participant was provided a list of sample questions to reference while completing the four segments of the exercise (see Appendix C).

The exercise participants were divided into three groups. Group 1 consisted of four firefighters that were not members of the training division. Group 2 consisted of the captain of training and one instructor. Group 3 consisted of the lieutenant of training and two instructors. The researcher's role was to facilitate the SWOT analysis exercise and document the results for the applied research project.

The groups were then segregated into their own rooms. Each group was given 15 minutes to identify five key elements related to the particular segment of the SWOT and write them on a piece of easel paper. After completing their lists, the three groups reconvened in a common room where they placed their easel paper on a wall. Each group then explained their list of five items to the other participants. All of the participants were given an opportunity to ask questions related to the items on the lists. The three lists (one from each group) provided 15 items for each segment.

The participants were asked to prioritize the items on the lists. Each of the nine participants was given five stars. Each star represented one vote. Participants were asked to place a star next to the item(s) that they felt were of the most importance. Participants were allowed to place multiple stars next to an item they felt strongly about.

For example, a participant could place a single star next to five different items or all five stars next to a single item. However, each participant only had five stars for each segment of the exercise and the stars could not be used for other segments. The five items receiving the most votes (stars) were considered the most important items for that segment. This process was repeated for each segment of the SWOT analysis exercise.

The facilitator documented each of the top five strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. A detailed explanation of the findings can be found in the results section. The SWOT matrix submitted to the fire chief can be found in Appendix F. The exercise took 3 hours to complete. This included introductions, explaining the ground rules/expectations, and forming the work groups (20 minutes), 15 minutes for each segment (four segments), 20 minutes for each prioritization segment (four segments), and 20 minutes for the conclusion/wrap up of the exercise.

The SWOT analysis exercise had some limitations. An internal search of the MFD and other City of Monroe departments did not produce any previous SWOT analysis, making it difficult to compare the past to the present.

The participants represented the diversity of the MFD. However, 9 participants or 23% of the membership may have been too small of a sample size to get an accurate representation of the entire membership.

Only one of the nine participants was familiar with a SWOT analysis and had been part of the process on a prior occasion. Although each participant received instructions and had an opportunity to ask questions at any time, their lack of experience and knowledge of the overall process may have been a limitation.

Holding the meeting at an offsite location reduced interruptions and provided a level of privacy that was not available at the fire station. However, the process of prioritizing the key elements for each segment lacked anonymity. A private, electronic method of voting may have reduced the potential of outside influences affecting the outcomes.

Finally, when participants analyze their own organization there is a potential for groupthink. Although the researcher did not witness it, when people with formal authority are a part of the SWOT analysis process there is a chance that subordinates will conform to what they perceive is the desired opinion.

Results

Nine members of the MFD participated in the SWOT analysis exercise. The results of the exercise were used to answer the four research questions. See Appendix F for the SWOT matrix that resulted from the exercise.

Research Question 1: What are the strengths of the Monroe Fire Department's training program?

The top five strengths identified during the SWOT analysis exercise were knowledgeable instructors (9 stars), capital assets (7 stars), advanced planning & adaptability (5 stars), professional networks (4 stars), and instructor autonomy/empowerment (3 stars).

Collectively, the MFD's instructors have 150 years of experience with the Monroe Fire Department. They hold state certifications as Firefighter 1, Firefighter 2, Motor Pump Operator, Fire Instructor 1 & 2, Fire Inspector, and Fire Officer 1 (MFD Training Records, 2017). The instructors are cross-trained to teach multiple subjects such as, search and rescue, ground ladders, ventilation methods, confined space rescue, extrication, and fire suppression techniques.

A number of members provide support services and serve in non-instructional roles. In addition, the training division often utilizes the company officers when the subject matter is related to their area of expertise (see Appendix H).

The training division has access to a number of capital assets, such as the department's command vehicles (3), engines (3), squads (2), ladder/truck (1), brush truck (1), tenders (2), high-volume class A & B foam trailer (1), ATV with water and EMS capabilities (1), breathing air trailer (1), and (2) fire stations. Having a variety of apparatus provides the flexibility to conduct training exercises as individual companies.

Having two stations provides the flexibility for the training division to conduct multiple classes during inclement weather. For example, the classroom at station 1 can be conducting scenario based company officer exercises, while the classroom at station 2 may be reviewing a lecture on building construction. At the same time, firefighters in the apparatus bay at station 1 can be practicing a variety of search and rescue techniques, while the firefighters in the apparatus bay of station 2 may be reviewing maintenance and operations for small equipment such as saws, generators, and extrication tools.

The MERIT Center is located on 6 acres on the northeast side of the city limits and is large enough to accommodate multiple training operations simultaneously. Having the MERIT Center located away from a residential area reduces the risk to the public when conducting live fire exercises.

Advanced planning and adaptability were identified as strengths of the training program. Instructors plan training 8-10 months in advance of delivery. Planning 8-10 months in advance allows the instructor(s) the time needed to review the details of each training exercise, prepare for their roles, and coordinate with external partners.

Any number of things can force the training division to make last minute changes to the agenda. For example, if a primary instructor gets sick or has to work late, cross training allows another instructor to step into his/her role. If the weather suddenly changes, the ability to adapt quickly allows the training division to transition from an outside training to an inside training. Apparatus breakdowns, low attendance, and an incident response are all examples of why the training division needs to have contingency plans and remain flexible.

The instructors' personal and professional networks provide a number of opportunities that contribute directly to the training program. Whether it is the local salvage yard donating cars for extrication training, a local business remaining open after hours so the department can do a walk-through, or a guest speaker, the personal and professional relationships the instructors have are important to the success of the training program.

When considering the number of moving parts associated with the design and delivery of training and the fact that the training division is comprised of volunteers whose schedules often conflict with one another, any form of micromanagement would most likely cripple the instructors' efforts. Having the flexibility to do their job on their schedule and the empowerment to make decisions were identified as strengths of the training program.

Research Question 2: What are the weaknesses of the Monroe Fire Departments training program?

The top five weaknesses identified during the SWOT analysis exercise were, motivating an aging workforce (8 stars), no budget (6 stars), limited tools and props (5 stars), declining number of instructors (5 stars), and communications (3 stars).

Motivating an aging workforce can be difficult. Finding fresh methods for conducting repetitive training topics such as, ropes, ladders, water supply, and search and rescue can be a

challenge when 50% of the membership has 15 or more years of experience. Another challenge is finding a fresh voice or perspective for the members to hear from. Three of the seven instructors have been in their role for 10 or more years. The remaining four instructors have been in their roles for the past 5 years (MFD Membership Records, 2017).

Conducting the same drills with the same people over a long period has resulted in a laissez-faire approach to training. Some members are simply going through the motions while others are choosing to skip the training altogether. The attendance problem is compounded when new members begin to adopt this passive attitude towards training.

Not having its own line item within the department's budget creates challenges for the training division. Not having its own budget makes it difficult for the training division to plan for long-term expenditures. Designated funding would enable the training division to build, purchase, and maintain small training props, replace outdated and worn equipment, and invest in the professional development of the instructors.

The training division has a limited number of small tools. For example, to build or repair a training prop, members must provide their own tools and not everyone owns the tools necessary to do this kind of work. In addition, whether it is a square, a tape measure, a bag of screws, or a drill, it seems that something that will be needed is always overlooked or forgotten at home. Having a cache of tools at the fire station would improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the training division.

Additional small props and training aids would increase the options available to the training division. In the past, the training division has used the class A burn tower at the MERIT Center to simulate a multi-story residential occupancy (apartment building). The challenge is

that with only two manikins the first due engine companies complete the drill before the third and fourth due apparatus get an opportunity to participate in the exercise.

Having additional manikins would allow later arriving units to participate in the scenario and create opportunities to evaluate the department's operational capabilities. Examples of other small props that would benefit the training program are an artificial smoke machine, search & rescue maze, a nozzle tree for flowing multiple lines, wall breach props, a basement prop, and classroom aids.

Who is up next? In 2013, the training division had 15 active instructors, today they have seven (MFD Membership Records, 2017). Having fewer instructors has increased the workload for the others. A breakdown of the MFD's membership by years of experience: 61% have more than 15 years of experience, 17% have between 5 and 15 years of experience , and 22% have less than 5 years of experience (MFD Membership Records, 2017). The members with 15 or more years of experience have not shown any interest in making the time commitment necessary to be an instructor and four of the seven members with enough experience to be instructors have already served as members of the training division and resigned because of the time commitment (personnel communication, 2017). The inability to recruit new instructors is considered a weakness of the training program.

The SWOT analysis exercise identified communication as an internal weakness. The results indicate that the training division could do a better job of communicating their expectations to the members during training.

Research Question 3: What opportunities exist for the Monroe Fire Department's training program?

The top five opportunities identified during the SWOT analysis exercise were, integrate driver/operator training (12 stars), alternative training format (8 stars), joint operations (7stars), planned growth at the MERIT Center (5 stars), and external instructors (3 stars).

Each of the exercise participants felt there was an opportunity to integrate the driver/operator training with the department's regular training. Low attendance at the driver/operator training is a consistent problem for the apparatus division and finding a time and/or place for members to make-up regular training is a challenge for the training division. The participants felt that integrating driver/operator training with the department's regular training might reduce the workload on instructors, reduce total training nights by up to 50%, and provide a means for members to make-up missed training.

The participants felt it was time to begin researching alternative formats for training. Items identified were web-based apps to provide refresher training on topics that do not need to be covered in a classroom or face-to-face. Investing in web-cam technology that will allow members to attend training from a remote location, and review the length and frequency of training.

The participants felt because of its size (6 acres) and class A burn structures the MERIT Center offered an opportunity for conducting joint training with other organizations. These training exercises would provide an opportunity to improve mutual-aid operations and gain an understanding of the equipment and skills the surrounding fire departments have to offer. The participants also felt that conducting joint trainings would create networking opportunities for emergency and non-emergency organizations.

The MERIT Center does not have a written plan for future development. The participants felt there was an opportunity to form a diverse team to develop a strategic plan for the growth and development of the MERIT Center. This team should include representatives from fire, law enforcement, EMS, emergency management, academia, and private businesses.

Participants' felt that by utilizing outside instructors the MFD could reduce the workload of its instructors and introduce the membership to fresh ideas and perspectives. Outside instructors may also create an opportunity to hold training events that reach multiple disciplines. For example, training events focused on resource management, public relations, and/or leadership may attract people from public works, Red Cross, and private businesses. These types of events provide an opportunity to build bridges outside of the emergency services community.

Research Question 4: What threatens the success of the Monroe Fire Department's training program?

The top five threats identified during the SWOT analysis exercise were competing interests (11 stars), training format (8 stars), instructor requirements (6 stars), funding (4 stars), and public relations (2 stars).

Family obligations, working multiple jobs, community service organizations, and hobbies all compete with the fire department for our members' time. The frequency and length of time we request from our members as well as how we utilize that time play a critical part in whether the member decides to spend their discretionary time at the fire department or somewhere else.

The participants consider the current training format to be a threat to the training program. The participants expressed concern over the fluctuation of training end times, pointing out that the end times have varied from 9:00pm, to 9:15pm, and sometimes as late as 9:30pm for the past several years. The participants questioned whether the inconsistent end times and a

member's need to be somewhere else immediately following training may be having a cause and effect relationship with the decreased attendance at training.

Participants questioned if the MFD was asking too much of their instructors. Completion of a 40-hour class and a written test are required to obtain state certification as a Fire Instructor 1 in Wisconsin. Instructors must submit documentation showing 240 teaching hours every 5 years to renew their certification ("WTCS Training Flow Chart," 2017). The MFD requires an instructor to obtain and retain state certification as a Fire Instructor 1 although there is no such requirement by the state of Wisconsin to teach fire related skills or topics within your organization.

Instructors also spend time in monthly division meetings, prepping for training, and attending professional development classes. The MFD may need to review its requirements for instructors or find a way to reduce their workload. The current instructor requirements are considered a threat to the training program.

The participants were concerned with the uncertainty of funding. In the past, the MFD has been awarded a number of federal grants for purchases such as the replacement of turnout gear and self-contained breathing apparatus. In the past, the Monroe City Council has been supportive of the MFD, rarely reducing its budget. However, the participants felt that because of the competition for federal grant dollars and other city departments competing for the same pot of money, the threat of the MFD's budget being cut is very real. Any reduction in the MFD's budget will have a negative impact on the training division and is considered a threat to the training program.

The public's perception of the MFD plays a significant role in the organization's fund raising and recruitment efforts. How the member's interact with the community during

emergency and non-emergency events plays an important role in shaping a positive public image.

The MFD has invested many hours training its members to manage and mitigate emergency incidents. What the MFD has not done is train its members on the soft skills necessary to interact with the public in emergency and non-emergency events. Whether it is demonstrating empathy for a family that just lost their home or interacting with children at a fire education event, the members must rely on their own personal experiences to interact with the public. The participants considered the lack of public relations skills as a threat to the MFD's ability to promote a positive public image.

Discussion

The purpose of the applied research project was to conduct a SWOT analysis of the MFD's training program. A SWOT analysis is an examination of an organization's internal strengths and weaknesses, its opportunities for growth and improvement, and the threats the external environment presents to its survival (Harrison, 2010).

The SWOT analysis process should involve people who are essential in the development and implementation of the organization's strategic plan ("Strategic planning," 2017). The SWOT analysis exercise included command staff, instructors, and senior members of the department. Each of the participants has the organizational knowledge necessary to analyze the MFD's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, and they are important in furthering the department's mission.

The meeting was held offsite at a local business to limit interruptions as recommended by McCarthy (2015) and Melapall (2010). The location provided breakout rooms for the individual groups and a central location for them to reconvene with their lists. The quiet breakout rooms

and limited distractions created an environment ripe for brainstorming. The privacy offered by the offsite location encouraged an open and honest dialogue among the participants.

At the beginning of the meeting, the facilitator provided each participant with a list of ground rules and explained the objective and goals of the SWOT analysis (see Appendices D & E). Allotting time at the beginning of the meeting to define the purpose and process of a SWOT analysis proved beneficial as eight of the nine participants were not familiar with the term SWOT analysis and had not been a part of a SWOT analysis before this meeting.

Each participant was also provided a list of sample questions to help them identify key elements during each segment of the SWOT analysis (see Appendix C). The sample questions were developed using the examples found during the literature review of (Keeley, 2017) and ("Doing a S.W.O.T. analysis," 2017). The sample questions proved helpful as participants referenced them throughout the exercise.

Jurevicius (2013) explains that the process of determining if something is a strength, weakness, opportunity, or threat is not always black and white and often is determined by an individual's perspective. This became evident when the participants identified the instructors' knowledge as a strength and then later identified the MFD's training requirements for instructors as threat.

I believe it is fair to conclude that the MFD's training requirements are at least partially responsible for the instructors' knowledge, leading me to concur with Jurevicius (2013) that depending on an individual's perspective, something could qualify for one or more segments of the SWOT analysis.

The SWOT analysis identified five internal strengths and five internal weaknesses in the MFD's training program, as well as five external opportunities and five external threats to the

MFD's training program. Chand (2017) explains that a SWOT analysis improves an organizations efficiency and effectiveness by pairing its internal strengths with external opportunities. At the beginning of the exercise, the participants were instructed to consider anything directly controlled by the training division as internal, and anything outside of the training division's control as external.

The participants identified the vast knowledge of the instructors as a strength and the idea of integrating the driver/operator training with the department's regular training as an opportunity. Utilizing the training division for all of the department's training will improve organizational effectiveness through the consistency of instructors. Integrating driver/operator training with the department's regular training will create efficiencies by reducing payroll related to training, reducing fuel costs, and reducing wear on the apparatus.

The SWOT analysis serves as a risk management tool by comparing the organization's internal weaknesses to its external threats. Markgraf, (2017) recommends using a 1-3 scale to identify the level of risk or probability of a weakness and/or threat.

The participants identified an increasing workload on instructors as a weakness of the training program. Competing interests such as family, work, and hobbies were identified as threats to the training program. The training program and competing interests are both vying for the instructors' time. The MFD must carefully manage the demands it places on the instructors or the probability/risk of losing them to competing interests will increase.

The SWOT analysis has a number of organizational implications. The internal and external factors identified during the SWOT analysis will provide the information needed for the training division to develop a strategic plan.

The solutions and recommendations identified during the SWOT analysis often approached a problem from a technical perspective rather than an adaptive perspective. For example, from a technical perspective, integrating the driver/operator training with the MFD's regular training should be as simple as issuing a directive that states; "on this date the driver/operator training will be integrated with the department's regular training. In addition, the responsibility for the driver/operator training will transfer from the apparatus division to the training division."

However, from an adaptive perspective, one must consider who wins, who loses, and how each may react. Will members of the apparatus division feel they lost because responsibility for training the driver/operators has been reassigned? Will the members of the apparatus division feel they won because their workload has been reduced, leaving them more time for other interests?

Will the members of the training division feel they won because they now have control of all the training? Will the members of the training division feel they lost because their workload has increased and they now have less time for other interests?

How will the driver/operators react to the change? Will they feel like winners because the integration will create efficiencies and reduce the number of nights they need to be at the fire station, leaving them more time for other interests? Will the driver/operators feel like losers because fewer training nights will result in a smaller paycheck? The cause and effect of any change must be taken into consideration from a technical and an adaptive perspective in order to maintain organizational harmony.

Recommendations

The problem is the MFD's training division has not conducted a SWOT analysis of the training program. The purpose of the applied research project is to conduct a SWOT analysis of the MFD's training program. Action research methods were used to answer the following four questions:

1. What are the strengths of the Monroe Fire Department's training program?
2. What are the weaknesses of the Monroe Fire Department's training program?
3. What opportunities exist for the Monroe Fire Department's training program?
4. What threatens the success of the Monroe Fire Department's training program?

The following recommendations will be forwarded to the Fire Chief.

1. It is recommended that administration schedule listening sessions with the membership to identify alternative formats to the training program.
2. It is recommended that resources be allocated to develop and execute a strategic plan that addresses the key factors identified in the SWOT analysis.
3. It is recommended that the SWOT analysis be expanded to include the MFD's apparatus, EMS, and safety divisions.
4. It is recommended that the SWOT analysis process be shared with the City's administration so it can be used as a reference for other departments.

In conclusion, as the MFD continues to evolve as an all hazards organization it is important that the training division have a strategic plan that defines what, when, and how it will deliver the training necessary to develop its members and maintain a state of readiness. The information gathered in the SWOT analysis exercise is a precursor to developing a strategic plan for the MFD's training division.

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Appendix A

Dr. Keely SWOT Analysis Sample Questions

1. Your list of strengths should be able to answer:

- a. What are the unit's advantages?
- b. What does the unit do well?
- c. What relevant resources do you have access to?
- d. What do other people see as your strengths?
- e. What would you want to boast about to someone who knows nothing about this organization and its works?

Think in terms of: capabilities, competitive advantages; resources, assets, people (experience, knowledge); marketing, quality, location, accreditations, qualifications, and certifications, and process/systems.

2. Your list of weaknesses should be able to answer:

- a. What can be improved?
- b. What is done poorly?
- c. What should be avoided?
- d. What are you doing as an organization that you feel could be done more effectively/efficiently?
- e. If you could change one thing that would help this department function more effectively, what would you change?

Think in terms of disadvantages, gaps in capabilities, lack of competitive strength, reputation, financial, timescales/deadlines, morale/leadership, accreditations, and process/systems.

3. Your list of opportunities should be able to answer:

- a. Are there other organizations that you can collaborate with?
- b. What other funding options are available?
- c. Are you politically networked with local, state, and national representatives?
- d. Is there new technology available that you have not taken advantage of?
- e. What human resources have not been allocated to other roles/responsibilities?

Think in terms of market developments, competitor vulnerabilities, industry/lifestyle trends, and geographical partnerships.

4. Your list of threats should be able to answer:

- a. What obstacles do you face?
- b. What is our competition doing?
- c. Are the required specifications for your job/services changing?
- d. Is changing technology threatening your position?
- e. Do you have financial problems?
- f. Could any of your weaknesses seriously threaten you unit?

Think in terms of competitors, regulations, technology, funding, and other external factors that may have a negative effect on your operations.

Appendix B

Doing a S.W.O.T. Analysis for your Company - Sample Questions

1. Strengths

- a. What does your company do well
- b. Do you have a recent achievement
- c. Are you financially sound
- d. Do you have current technology
- e. Do you have deep knowledge or skill base with in your staff
- f. Do you have a clear strategic vision

2. Weaknesses

- a. Do you have operating problems
- b. Are your organizational communications clear
- c. Do you have marketing skills
- d. How are you perceived by your customers

3. Opportunities

- a. Are there external resources available that you have not contacted
- b. Are you utilizing all of your internal resources
- c. Is there complacency within the organization
- d. Is there new technology available that can solve your problem(s)

4. Threats

- a. Are your funding sources unstable at risk
- b. What legislation or regulations are hindering your ability to operate
- c. Are you dependent on a skilled workforce
- d. What current organizational practices are becoming obsolete
- e. Do you have new competitors
- f. Have there been cultural changes among your customers

Appendix C

SWOT Analysis Exercise - Sample Questions

SWOT Exercise - Example(s)		
Internal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Be honest & realistic 	Strengths.... everything the department does well. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are our instructional strengths? - What do we do well compared to similar departments? Think knowledge/skills/abilities - What aspects of the training program are liked by the membership? Why? 	Weaknesses.... areas needing improvement. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are our instructional weaknesses? - What knowledge gaps exist? What do we think we know, but really don't? - What would the membership criticize about the training program? - What do we (the training division) wish we could do, but can't?
External <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Remember, threats are often opportunities 	Opportunities.... trends and possibilities that exist outside of the organization. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What changes/trends are happening in our industry that we like? - What resources are available that we have not pursued? - Are there other organizations that we should consider partnering with? 	Threats.... current and future obstacles/risks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What current obstacles are we facing? What is stopping us from doing what we want to do? - What "storm clouds" are on the horizon? What is the next "service" we need to prepare to deliver? - If this _____ happened, it would make it very difficult for us to do our jobs. - Could we be replaced? If so, by what or whom?

Appendix D

SWOT Analysis Exercise – Ground Rules

1. Respect each other and refrain from making personal attacks.
2. Acknowledge that it is okay to disagree.
3. Listen to others, do not interrupt.
4. Everyone participates; no one dominates, value the diversity of the team members
5. Honor time limits: be on time, start on time, end on time
6. Recognize that all ideas are potentially good ideas, do not rush to evaluate suggestions; keep an open mind.
7. Stay on task – refrain from small talk that is not related to the SWOT analysis.
8. Be honest & Respect Confidentiality, what is said in the meeting should stay in the meeting.
9. Be prepared for the meeting by reviewing materials that are distributed ahead of time.
10. Be committed to the project; arrange to not be interrupted during the meeting. Turn off cell phones.

Appendix E

SWOT Analysis Exercise – Objective & Goals

Objective

The objective of the SWOT analysis exercise is to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the Monroe Fire Department's training program and submit those findings to Chief Smits.

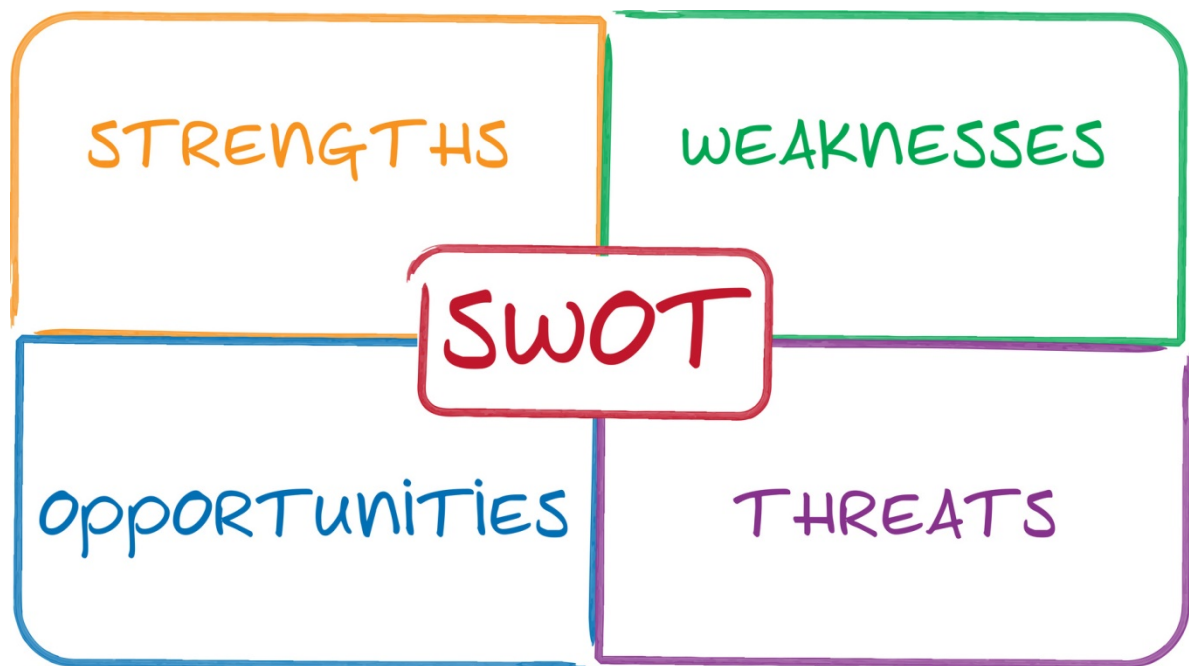
Goals

1. Identify and prioritize 5 internal strengths
2. Identify and prioritize 5 internal weaknesses
3. Identify and prioritize 5 external opportunities
4. Identify and prioritize 5 external threats
5. Collect and summarize the findings into a SWOT matrix

Appendix F

Monroe Fire Department SWOT Analysis Results

Separating the trees from the forest



A look at the Monroe Fire Department's Training Program

Dear Chief Smits,

Thank you for empowering me to conduct a SWOT analysis of the departments training program. The results are documented in the attached SWOT matrix. Following your review of the results, I would appreciate an opportunity to discuss the development of a strategic plan that will allow the training division to use its strengths to capitalize on the opportunities identified while also addressing our weaknesses and threats.

I would like to acknowledge and express my sincere appreciation to the following members who sacrificed time away from their families and/or hobbies to participate in the SWOT analysis exercise. Their willingness to be open and honest while discussing topics that at times can be controversial is what makes the information they share so valuable to our continuous improvement efforts.

Tom Burkhalter, Captain of Training

Jeff Kundert, Lieutenant of Training

Travis Andrews, Instructor

Dan Bartelt, Instructor

Brian Dreikosen, Firefighter

Gene Jacobson, Firefighter

Andy Kubly, Instructor

Alex Lonien, Firefighter

Dan Zilkowski, Firefighter

Sincerely,
Alan Rufer, MBA
Division Chief - Training

Internal	Strengths
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Experienced Instructors <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Instructors collectively have 150 years of experience b. Instructors are cross trained in different subject areas c. Instructors hold several state certifications 2. Capital Assets <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. 15 apparatus – 3 special ops units (ATV, Foam Trailer, Air Trailer) b. 2 fire stations – 1 that is less than 10yrs old c. 6 acre training facility <ol style="list-style-type: none"> I. 2 – Class A burn facilities II. Flashover Simulator III. 9000 gallon semi-trailer fuel tanker IV. Car fire prop V. Driver/Operator Course 3. Program Planning & Adaptability <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Training is planned in advance (often 4-6mths ahead of delivery) b. Training is flexible – Plan A, with a back-up plan c. Training has clear objectives and measurable results 4. Professional Networks <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Personal Networks b. Professional Networks 5. Autonomy/Empowerment <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Instructors are given flexibility in how and when they do their job. Allows them to manage their personal time and their fire department obligations. b. Instructors are empowered to make decisions regarding the delivery of training to improve the quality and overall experience of the members.

Internal	Weaknesses
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Challenges motivating an aging workforce <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Repetitive Topics b. Repetitive Instructors c. Complacency – been there, done that (lack of excitement) 2. Budget <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Difficult to plan – availability of funds can change at any time b. Difficult to commit to instructor development c. Difficult to replace old or purchase new equipment and/or props 3. Limited Tools & Props <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Members often have to bring or even buy tools to do department work b. Very little has been invested in training props such as a smoke machine, search & rescue maze, or classroom aids. 4. Declining number of instructors <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Low number of instructors = increased work loads b. No one in the pipeline to replace retiring instructors c. Internal Competing Interests <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. EMS Division ii. Safety Division iii. Apparatus – Clean-up iv. Apparatus – Drivers Training v. Fundraising Activities 5. Communication / Vision <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Improve communications on the expectations for training b. Better, communicate the vision for the training program and how it fits into the department's long-term goals.

External	Opportunities
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Integrate drivers training into regular training <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Reduce instructor work load b. Reduce number of nights at the fire station by as much as 50% c. Provide a means for members to make up practical training 2. Alternative training methods <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Web-based training to cover topics that may be missed b. Webcam Technology to attend classroom training from remote location c. Review and define “required” training length and number of days d. Interactive simulators 3. Joint Operations <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Improved mutual aid operations. Know what our partners have and what they are capable of doing. b. Improve working relationships with surrounding agencies: fire, law enforcement, EMS, and emergency management. c. Meetings with non-emergency response agencies to understand their needs and capabilities. 4. Planned MERIT Center growth <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Form a working committee to create a strategic plan for developing the MERIT Center to meet the needs of all its stakeholders. b. Committee will include representatives from area fire, law enforcement, EMS, emergency management, and educational organizations, and private businesses. 5. External Instructors <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Reduce internal instructors work load b. Offer different perspectives and expertise that we don’t have internally c. Opportunity to hold training events that cross operational boundaries. Resource management, public relations, and leadership classes, include public works, Red Cross, and private businesses.

External	Threats
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Outside Competing Interests <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Family obligations b. Work – primary and second jobs c. Other organizations – Optimists, Church, Hobby Club 2. Training Format <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Limited options to make-up training b. Limited delivery methods – adjust to different learning styles c. Inconsistent end times, length, and frequency of training 3. Instructor Requirements <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Recertification – 240 instructional hours required a. Monthly division meeting b. Miscellaneous meetings, communications, and prep work associated with the design and delivery of training. c. Professional development – time commitment 4. Funding <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. No dedicated line in the budget. Any decrease in funding will have a negative effect on the training program. 5. Public Perception <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Lack of training in soft skills to communicate with the public. b. Lack of non-emergency interaction with the public.

Appendix G

SWOT Analysis – Process/Steps

1. Select and invite a diverse group of people to participate in the SWOT analysis exercise.
2. Introduce team members; explain their role(s) in the SWOT analysis exercise.
3. Icebreaker activity
4. Review the objectives (what is a SWOT analysis), goals, and ground rules for the exercise.
5. Assign breakout groups and rooms
6. Segment 1 (15 minutes) – Breakout groups go to their assigned rooms and identify 5 internal strengths of the MFD's training program.
7. Reconvene (20 minutes) – Each group explains the items on their lists, participants vote by placing 1-5 stickers next to the items they feel are the most important. The five items receiving the most votes will be considered the key factors for that segment.
8. Segment 2 (15 minutes) – Breakout groups go to their assigned rooms and identify 5 internal weaknesses of the MFD's training program.
9. Reconvene (20 minutes) – Each group explains the items on their lists, participants vote by placing 1-5 stickers next to the items they feel are the most important. The five items receiving the most votes will be considered the key factors for that segment.
10. Segment 3 (15 minutes) – Breakout groups go to their assigned rooms and identify 5 external opportunities of the MFD's training program.
11. Reconvene (20 minutes) – Each group explains the items on their lists, participants vote by placing 1-5 stickers next to the items they feel are the most important. The five items receiving the most votes will be considered the key factors for that segment.
12. Segment 4 (15 minutes) – Breakout groups go to their assigned rooms and identify 5 external threats of the MFD's training program.
13. Reconvene (20 minutes) – Each group explains the items on their lists, participants vote by placing 1-5 stickers next to the items they feel are the most important. The five items receiving the most votes will be considered the key factors for that segment.
14. Meeting conclusion – all groups brought back together, opportunity for questions and reflection on the findings and the process.
15. Results – facilitator documents the results in a SWOT matrix and submits to the Fire Chief.

Appendix H

Monroe Fire Department Officers and roles/responsibilities

Name	Rank	Area of Responsibility
Alan Rufer	Division Chief	Training
Tom Burkhalter	Captain	Training
Jeff Kundert	Lieutenant	Training
Chuck Montgomery	Division Chief	Apparatus Maintenance / Engineer Training
Nick Bartels	Captain	Apparatus Maintenance / Engineer Training
Chad Pfund	Lieutenant	Apparatus Maintenance / Engineer Training
Eric Welty	Captain	Safety Officer
Jared Van Dellen	Lieutenant	EMS Officer