IDENTIFYING AND MANAGING CONFLICT WITHIN THE FIRE DEPARTMENT

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF CHANGE

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Appendix A: Steps for Making Conflict within the Fire Service

Appendix B: Steps for Managing Conflict within the Fire Service, an Implementation Guide

Appendix C: Step-by-step Guide for Resolving Conflict within the Fire Service
ABSTRACT

Last year, Martinsville Fire Department responded to 1,900 emergency calls and provided fire protection and EMS first response to Martinsville, Virginia, a city of 15,400 residents. Twenty-eight career and fifteen volunteer firefighters provided the services from two stations. The problem was that conflict frequently occurred among departmental firefighters. Examples included signs of stress, short-tempers, irritability, and tension.

Personnel, who returned from a stressful fire or EMS call, sporadically exhibited tension towards another firefighter that answered the same call. In other situations, a firefighter with a marital problem at home appeared, at the workplace, with characteristics of anger and conflict towards other members of the fire department. Finally, immediately following departmental promotions, fire personnel sometimes showed signs of anger towards other station personnel.

The purpose of this research project was to develop strategies for managing conflict within the department.

The action research method was used and answered the following questions:

1. What are possible causes of personnel conflict within the fire service?
2. What is the impact of conflict among the human resources of the fire service?
3. What are recommended strategies for managing conflict within the department?

Research was conducted with an in-depth literature review. After carefully examining fire service publications, emergency service journals, and college-level managerial textbooks, the results were formed from the collected information. It was
learned that possible causes of personnel conflict include role conflict, present functioning of the department, competition for limited resources, and developments within personal relationships.

Also, insight was gained as to the impact of conflict, including both positive and negative consequences such as organizational changes, stress, tension, confusion, irritability, retaliation, and increases in group cohesion. Lastly, there are strategies for managing conflict. From the latter, the recommendation is to focus department efforts on three phases of conflict management including preparation, prevention, and a performing phase that adheres to a step-by-step conflict management strategy.
INTRODUCTION

The firefighters of Martinsville Fire Department (MFD) spend numerous hours together. Fire personnel respond in-groups to emergency calls, exercise with other firefighters, attend training drills together, eat daily meals with each other, and are with respective firefighters more than some personal family members. Such time spent together often adds a high degree of personal stress, especially when providing life-saving services to the citizens of the community. Emergency calls frequently result in stressful times that subject firefighters to vulnerable periods of probable, personal conflict. Working twenty-four hour shifts and being away from a personal home life results in a catalyst for initiating personal conflict within the fire department.

Firefighters of MFD often demonstrate signs of personal conflict, among each other, including personal signs of stress, short-temps, irritability, and tension. Personnel, returning from a stressful fire or EMS call, sporadically exhibit tension towards another firefighter that may have been on the same call. In other situations, a firefighter with a marital problem at home may appear, at the workplace, with characteristics of anger and conflict towards other members of the fire department. Finally, immediately following departmental promotions, fire personnel may be angry towards other station personnel, even those that did not apply for the position.

The problem is that conflict frequently occurs among departmental firefighters. The purpose of this research project is to develop strategies for managing conflict within the department. The action research method was used and answered the following questions:
1. What are possible causes of personnel conflict within the fire service?
2. What is the impact of conflict among the human resources of the fire service?
3. What are recommended strategies for managing conflict within the department?

**BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE**

Martinsville Fire Department (MFD) is a combination department that covers 12 square miles, nurtures 15,400 citizens, employees 28 career personnel, accommodates fifteen volunteers, and provides services from two stations. The department is composed of three divisions that include suppression, emergency medical services (EMS), and prevention. Four personnel of the career staff perform administrative duties and are not assigned to engine companies. Eight firefighters are assigned per shift, with three total shifts, and a minimum staffing of six personnel per day. When fully staffed, six firefighters are assigned to the main station, and two firefighters are assigned to the second station. At less than full staffing, firefighters at the main-station are reduced, with four or five personnel on duty while two firefighters remain at the second station. Volunteer firefighters may respond to the scene of a call or may ride the apparatus responding from the station. Volunteers are in no way obligated to specific duty rosters.

Per excerpts of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1500, Fire Department Occupational Safety and Health Program (1997), the department is understaffed as evidenced by the need for 17-19 firefighters on a typical fire ground while MFD may have only six firefighters for a similar scene. With so few firefighters, personnel are observed exhibiting signs of personal conflict such as irritability and short
tempers, often reported by firefighters to be sparked by the heavy call volume and personnel shortage. In addition to fire suppression duties, firefighters are cross-trained to provide advanced life support (ALS) patient care services. Per Hopkins (2000), fire personnel are forced to ride with patients to the hospital, as the attendant-in-charge of patient care, in at least 50% of all first responder calls that the department answers. This steady activity exposes firefighters to heavy levels of stress in that the personnel often return to the station exhibiting signs of exasperation towards each other, frequently resulting in conflicting situations.

Conflict is often defined by the culture in which we live (Glover, 2001). The fire service has a unique culture in that fire personnel train and serve in groups, as compared to other and professional and technical professions. Like many other U.S. fire agencies, MFD personnel complete daily exercise programs together, attend training drills together, eat daily meals with each other, and in essence, spend more time with each other than respective lives at individual domestic homes. Such time spent together often results in conflict among departmental personnel. Such firefighters’ culture stimulates an environment that ends with firefighters who display anger towards each other from such conflicting norms.

Departmental firefighters that are experiencing marital problems at home appear anxious at work and show other signs of conflict such as anger and a lack of patience with other departmental fire personnel. Also, during times surrounding in-house promotions, personnel may argue among each other, complete acts of sabotage, and perform retaliatory acts of revenge for promotional outcomes. Such situations are
examples of conflict that appears among organizational personnel. However, when duty calls, no one would know such conflicting periods are existent.

The present problem and potential, future associated conflicts are believed to be related to personal aspects of change, whether at home or at the fire department. The effects of change were studied in the Strategic Management of Change Course during the Executive Fire Officer Program at the National Fire Academy. MFD is genuinely concerned about studying consequences of conflict and identifying and developing strategies for managing conflict within the department in order to eradicate or mitigate the effects of such conflict. Future conflicting roles and norms could minimize the overall department’s effectiveness, prematurely end a firefighter’s tenure with the organization, and/or end with personal injury due to the consequences of the conflict.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

The primary objective of the literature review is to secure a solution for the research problem, development of strategies for managing conflict within the department. There are three areas of the end result that include identifying potential causes of conflict, examination of the effects of conflict, and solutions to effectively managing conflict. Research was conducted at the National Fire Academy’s Learning Resource Center in Emmitsburg, Maryland. Additionally, fire service publications, emergency service magazines, and books were researched and examined. No recent Executive Fire Officer research papers, on the subject, could be located while at the National Fire Academy. The focus of the research was to identify current sources that directly relate to the
problem. In at least one case, a source from 1975 was utilized due to no evidence of the given material being obsolete.

**Potential Causes of Conflict**

There are three variables that may lead to organizational conflict. Among the variables include role conflict; role performance degradation or role abandonment; and smooth, timely, and efficient functioning of the emergency response organization (Nehnevajsa and Wernette, 1988). The report states that a progression occurs. First, role conflict surfaces among members. Then, the member’s conflicting role results in individual degradation or role abandonment within the department. Finally, with continued progression, the organization suffers with the cumulative effects of the individual conflict. The progression is significant for a fire service agency. Member conflict not only affects individual performance, but it also creates negative implications for the department as a whole. Personal performance is a catalyst for internal failure.

The synopsis of Nehnevajsa and Wernette (1988) offers another interesting point. Role conflict is normal within society and is often contradictory and ambiguous. However, it is not true that perfect integration would represent a more ideal state of society. Such conflicting norms should be envisioned, expected, and anticipated.

Nehnevajsa and Wernette (1988) make another relevant statement in the associated research. It is explained that all individuals are likely to be faced with a dilemma when conflicting demands are made. An example of this implication is when a firefighter is faced with multiple, conflicting orders while on the fire ground. A company officer may order a firefighter to retrieve a pike pole while another officer may ask the
same firefighter to position a positive pressure fan. The conflicting demands result in a dilemma that sparks present role ambiguity and a source of future conflict due to personality disorders that may develop from power struggles.

Disputes mask other secondary issues, among them includes personality conflicts (Shanaberger, 1989). Additionally, regardless of the motivation for conflict, the resulting impact can be someone’s job, competence, and even financial wellbeing. This is an intriguing comment in determining which end-result is cause and which is effect. Specifically, if disputes may cause conflict, certainly and obviously conflict often ends in disputes. This analogy is another fact that supports the need for developing strategies for managing conflict within the department. Conflict must be managed in order to prevent further, future occurrences.

Shanaberger offers points that should be considered prior to initiating labor-related claims. Among the points of Shanaberger include:

“Prevention is always the least costly solution. Good hiring practices, diligent supervision, established and identifiable performance standards, and recognition of limitations are all factors that can curtail the employer/employee conflict” (p. 124).

Tensions and anxieties are apt to emerge in demographically diverse teams (Bateman and Snell, 1996). Demographics is defined as diversity among group members with such elements as socioeconomic status, ethnicity, gender, marital status, and other factors that create a sense of individualism and uniqueness. The fire service, collectively and with MFD as well, represent diverse entities. The modern era has encouraged
increased group diversity within the fire service; therefore, anticipated conflict should be expected as part of the increased dispersion of demographic characteristics.

Kreitner and Kinicki (1998) list competition for limited resources as an antecedent for conflict. Departmental firefighters have been witnessed depicting signs of interpersonal conflict immediately after internal promotions. During promotional situations, positions are limited, similar to other types of tangible resources. Kreitner and Kinicki go on to state that unresolved conflicts may spark future conflicts. With the case of promotions, many firefighters spend an entire career working side-by-side personnel that compete on an on-going basis, even competing for multiple positions over time. The conflict, could thereby, be re-ignited over and over again.

Glover (2001) reflects that relationships may invoke conflict. Firefighters spend enormous amounts of time together. After working twenty-four shifts, over years, and throughout a career, relationships develop. Relationships end favorably and unfavorably. Strong relationships could deter conflict or may cause conflict due to perceived expectations. Weak relationships may be a reason for severe conflict.

**Effects of Conflict**

At work or home, people experience conflict; if managed properly, conflict can have positive outcomes (White, 1991). White adds that conflict is positive in that it is an opportunity to clarify issues, policies or to clarify misunderstandings. Whether the result is negative or positive depends largely upon the skills of either one or both of the involved parties. This offers an optimistic perspective since conflict does not necessarily indicate that negative implications will prevail.
Kofodimos (1995) says that organizations often focus on symptoms of conflict instead of the deeper forces that are to blame for personal life conflict. Symptoms of conflict include such factors as stress, tension, confusion, irritability, and even hostilities. Leaders should proactively focus on the reasons behind conflict and then implement measures for avoidance.

According to a publication from the International Association of Fire Chiefs (1993), labor-management conflict related to wages and working conditions is not a new issue in the fire service. It additionally states that the members of the International Association of Firefighters often use a conflicting situation to disrupt labor interests between firefighters and the fire chief. This has significant meaning to the fire service and fire service management. Not only does this demonstrate that conflict exists, but it also suggests that conflicting situations are exaggerated even more when the conflicting scenario is used to cause even more conflict.

The promotion of highly visible conflict is accomplished by conducting personal attacks against the fire chief in the form of votes of non-confidence, motions of censure or accusations of negligence. These attacks have taken the form of intense publicity campaigns, using the local news media and elected officials to undermine the chief’s ability to manage the fire department. (International Association of Fire Chiefs, 1993).

Up until the appearance of this quotation from the source, fire service conflict was only reflected in the file and rank positions. Management is not immune from the complications of conflict.
Change within the fire service is often the result of conflict (International Association of Fire Chiefs, 1993). The statement suggests that after times of conflict, the fire service often responds by invoking some type of change. This is often a strategic move to avoid future implications or mitigate escalating conflict.

The article goes on to say that new fire chiefs, most often those on the job less than two years, are more vulnerable to intentional and malicious conflict. Those chiefs hired from outside the department usually are placed in higher degrees of conflict than chiefs promoted internally. It is noted that when chiefs are hired from the external labor market, that there is usually an obvious history of existing conflict already present within the organization.

Ivancevich and Matteson (1999) categorize conflict into two effects. First, there is functional conflict. Defined as confrontation between groups that enhances and benefits the organization’s performance, this unique type of conflict is a positive effect. Once occurring, this type of conflict yields such fruits as increased awareness of problems that should be addressed, wider and more beneficial solutions to problems, and even innovation. Second, dysfunctional conflict is a situation in which the department reaps a problem or hindrance. The latter harms members and may extend to delaying organizational progress. Once the organization suffers, further conflict may extend to other department members and thus stimulate further conflict.

In an article by Filley (1975), conflict has distinct organizational advantages. There may be an increase in group-cohesiveness. Group members may become more tightly knit and actually improve performance. The level of work may become higher, and cooperation among work groups may become enhanced. Conflict may also serve as
a barrier of more serious conflict. A conflict of today may strengthen the group and potentially deter future episodes. Further, once conflict ensues, new solutions may be developed once the issues are brought to light. Lastly, conflict may yield innovative products and programs.

**Management of Conflict**

Coleman (1991) reports that a fire chief may receive a vote of no confidence, by department members, following times of conflict. Coleman offers some suggestions that chiefs can take to avoid these problems. Among the suggestions includes not retreating and becoming isolated following a conflicting problem. The author explains that facing the conflict allows a relationship to grow. Coleman gives a second pointer and cautions chief officers not to hide conflict from their respective supervisor. By discussing the situation, the conflict can be settled and all relevant players are readily informed.

There are three critical steps that departments can take to constructively manage conflict per Sashkin (1989).

1. **Understand the Cycles of Conflict.** Conflict expands over time.
   
   Usually, parties develop negative feelings over time. As time progresses, conflict may broaden, and individuals may even withdraw from each other.

2. **Discover Your Conflict Style.** Sashkin uses a seven-step outline to determine the individual, dominant conflict style of management.
3. **Deal with Conflict.** The author summarizes that research shows that only a strategy based on a problem-solving approach is consistently associated with positive outcomes. It is the problem-solving strategy that is usually the most successful, per the author. Sashkin uses a diagram, as replicated in Diagram 1, to illustrate the technique.

**Diagram 1**

**Strategies for Dealing with Conflict**

<table>
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<th>Concern for Others</th>
<th>Concern for Self</th>
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<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Smoothing</strong> (agreeing to disagree)</td>
<td><strong>Problem-Solving</strong> (facing the issues together)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bargaining</strong> (splitting the difference)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Avoiding</strong> (withdrawing)</td>
<td><strong>Fighting</strong> (win-lose)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
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Sashkin’s diagram implicates that leaders should encompass a high degree of concern for the other party and a high degree of concern for self if the manager is genuinely interested in successfully dealing with conflicting situations.
Sashkin, in Table 1, offers an eight-step guide for conflicting situations. Among the eight steps are:

**Table 1**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Eight-Step Procedures for Dealing with Conflict</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Present the issue unemotionally, and seek the other party’s help.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Clarify and define the issue.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Get the other person’s position.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Give your point of view.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Jointly develop an objective or condition on which both parties can agree.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Jointly choose one alternative as a tentative solution.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Jointly decide how each party will know if the solution is working.</td>
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An article appearing in a publication by the (ICMA) International City/County Management Association (2000) states, “Combination fire departments are difficult to manage because career firefighters and volunteer firefighters often have different institutional interests.” The subsequent varying degrees of interests often lead to conflict that may include personal conflict or conflict between the department and the local governing body. Furthermore, volunteers may experience the threat of loss of power, status, and identity that may lead to personnel conflict.

The ICMA article offers strategies for managing conflict within combination departments. First, when conflict is low, an integration strategy is recommended. It is such a strategy that consolidates department activities for both career and volunteer
firefighters. Examples include training, firefighting tactics and suppression, and fund raising. Second, when conflict is high, a federation strategy is optimal. Known as a complex method, the technique divides the managing powers between the career chief and volunteer officers. Caution should be exercised with a federation technique because a complex fire department system demands additional management skill as compared to a simple system.

Gardner and Taigman (1996) suggest two kinds of skill that are imperative for managing conflict, mega skills and technical skills. Mega skills are comparative with a foundation for managing conflict. It is mega skills that must be developed and immediately available when needed to handle a certain type of situation. It is about knowing oneself and then being able to step back, relax and then solicit the appropriate tactic to effectively handle the conflicting situation. Technical skills involve protecting oneself from danger if the scenario is a conflicting one. Technical skills also include effective listening, developing a perspective for the conflict, and then bringing closure to the actual conflict.

Glover (2001) offers five steps for managing conflict. Glover incorporates mediation into the process of managing conflict. Mediation is the act of allowing a neutral party to facilitate the conflict management process. The mediator in no way resolves the problem. The mediator simply keeps the process moving and does not get involved into the decision-making aspect. The philosophy of mediation is that the involved parties know all issues of the conflict, and the relevant parties have the knowledge to resolve the conflict. Therefore, the involved parties remedy the conflict with an unbiased mediator maintaining peace. The five steps, in Table 2, include:
Table 2

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Table 2: Glover’s Five Steps for Managing Conflict with the Mediation Process</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Introduction: the mediator sets the stage.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Storytelling: a time for people to be heard and share perceptions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Generating Options: to engage the parties in a creative and collaborative discussion about remedies for resolution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Resolution: affirms and clarifies the personal effort obtained through mediation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Closure: a time to acknowledge the parties for resolving the problem and reaffirming the agreement.</td>
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Glover (2001) recommends that supervisors complete an assessment such as the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument. By doing so, managers determine the dominant style of managing conflict.

Bateman and Snell (1996) provide a framework containing five conflict-management strategies. The various strategies represent a spectrum with assertiveness being on one end, unassertiveness on the other end, and compromise in the middle of the continuum. The strategies are highlighted as follows, in Diagram 2, as an illustration:
Diagram 2: Bateman and Snell’s Conflict Management Strategies

Per Bateman and Snell (1999), competing is a strategy in which conflicting parties act only on individual wishes without recognizing the issues of others. Collaborating is a technique that emphasizes both cooperation and assertiveness, and the goal is to maximize satisfaction of both parties portraying the conflict. Compromising is known as only moderate attention to both parameters and yields only a satisfice, but no real tangible outcome to the conflict. Avoiding is a false presumption that takes a hands-off approach. The conflict remains as is unless it vanishes on its own accord. Accommodating is a cooperative approach by both parties but lacks any assertiveness as to any person’s own interest. Bateman and Snell do not advocate any sole strategy, but do recommend a contingency approach that would allow the situation to dictate exactly which strategy that yields the optimal solution for the given conflict.
**Literature Summary / Influence**

Literature offers many causes of conflict. Per Nehnevajsa and Wernette (1988), causes include role conflict; role performance degradation or role abandonment; and smooth, timely, and efficient functioning of the emergency response organization. The same contributors philosophize that role conflict is normal within society and is often contradictory and ambiguous and may be caused by conflicting assignments such as those given on the fire ground.

(Bateman and Snell, 1996) confer that diverse work groups, as a side effect, often lead to conflict. Bateman and Snell do not discourage diversity, but rather offer the point for monitoring purposes. Kreitner and Kinicki (1998) list competition for limited resources as a realistic cause of conflict. Glover (2001) reflects that relationships may invoke conflict. Firefighters spend enormous amounts of time together, and therefore, result in relationships that are likely to lead to conflicting by-products.

Reviewed literature affirms certain effects caused by conflict. White (1991) says that a time of conflict allows a fire service agency to improve itself. Kofodimos (1995) says that organizations often focus on symptoms of conflict instead of the deeper forces that are to blame for personal life conflict. The deeper forces often involve personal factors that may not be associated with the job, but may include home-related criteria.

According to the International Association of Fire Chiefs (1993), labor-management conflict related to wages and working conditions is not a new issue in the fire service. Such conflicts often lead to further conflicts. Change within the fire service is often the result of conflict (International Association of Fire Chiefs, 1993). Changes may, as a result, be advantageous.
Ivancevich and Matteson (1999) categorize conflict into two effects. First, there is functional conflict that is defined as confrontation between groups that enhances and benefits the organization’s performance. This unique type of conflict is a positive effect. Once occurring, this type of conflict leads to such rewards as increased awareness of problems that should be addressed, wider and more beneficial solutions to problems, and even innovation. Second, dysfunctional conflict is a situation in which the department reaps a problem or hindrance. The latter harms members and may extend to delaying organizational progress. Once the organization suffers, further conflict may extend to other department members and thus stimulate further conflict.

In an article by Filley (1975), conflict has distinct organizational advantages that include an increase in group-cohesiveness and actually improve organizational performance. The level of work may become higher, and cooperation among work groups may become enhanced. Conflict may also serve as a barrier of more serious conflict. A conflict of today may strengthen the group and potentially deter future episodes. Further, once conflict ensues, new solutions may be developed once the issues are aired. Lastly, conflict may yield innovative products and programs.

Literature offered many suggestions and models for managing conflict. Coleman (1991) suggests that fire chiefs should not retreat and become isolated following a conflicting situation, instead the chief should face the conflict. The author explains that facing the conflict allows the relationship to grow.

There are three critical steps that departments can take to constructively manage conflict per Sashkin (1989). Among the steps include understanding the cycles of conflict, discovering one’s conflict style, and deal with the actual conflict. The author
summarizes that research shows that only a strategy based on a problem-solving approach is consistently associated with positive outcomes. It is the problem-solving strategy that is usually the most successful. Sashkin’s diagram, Diagram 1, implicates that leaders should encompass a high degree of concern for the other party and a high degree of concern for self if the manager is genuinely interested in successfully dealing with the conflicting situation.

An article appearing in a publication by the (ICMA) International City/County Management Association (2000) offers strategies for managing conflict within combination departments. First, when conflict is low, an integration strategy is recommended. Second, when conflict is high, a federation strategy is optimal. Known as a complex method, the technique divides the managing powers between the career chief and volunteer officers. Gardner and Taigman (1996) suggest two kinds of skill that are imperative for managing conflict, mega skills and technical skills. It is mega skills that must be developed and immediately available when needed to handle a certain type of situation. Technical skills involve protecting oneself from danger if the scenario is a conflicting one. Technical skills also include effective listening, developing a perspective for the conflict, and then bringing closure to the actual conflict.

Glover (2001) offers five steps for managing conflict. Glover incorporates mediation into the process of managing conflict. Mediation is another strategy to place in the manager’s toolbox for handling conflict. Bateman and Snell (1996) provide a framework containing five conflict-management strategies. The various strategies represent a spectrum with assertiveness being on one end, unassertiveness on the other end, and compromise in the middle of the spectrum. Bateman and Snell do not advocate
any sole strategy, but do recommend a contingency approach that would allow the situation to dictate exactly which strategy yields the preferred solution for the particular conflict.

**PROCEDURES**

The research project utilized the action research methodology to identify the following criteria: a) possible causes of personnel conflict within the fire service, b) the impact of conflict among the human resources of the fire service, and c) recommended strategies for managing conflict within the department. The procedures used to gather the noted information began with recognition of the underlying problem, a direct observation of conflict frequently occurring among departmental firefighters. The second step was performance of the literature review. The information was then utilized to develop the basis of the recommendations contained within this research project.

Literature was reviewed at the National Fire Academy’s Learning Resource Center in Emmitsburg, Maryland in July 2001 by the author of this particular research paper. Books were examined, specifically, books that contained information relevant to the underlying problem, research questions, and intended end-result of the research project. Fire and EMS magazine articles and trade journals were researched. Information that pertained to the given research questions was gathered from the sources. Data was organized as to the particular research question that it corresponded to, and the data was reported in the literature review. Upon return from the National Fire Academy, further research continued.
After departure from the National Fire Academy, from August 2001 through November 2001, the author of this research paper sought additional trade journals and fire-related magazine articles. Such documents were scanned, sorted, analyzed, and presented in the literature review. Pertinent data was collated in the literature review, in three sections labeled as potential causes of conflict, effects of conflict, and management of conflict. The aforementioned sources were located in the fire station’s library and in the author’s personal library. Further, an environment external to the fire service was visited. Management textbooks commonly used in collegiate instruction were chosen. This perspective was felt to be pertinent because such data is commensurate of human resources in a general sense. Fire service personnel often are employed in the private sector prior to entering the fire service and do possess personal characteristics as any other human being maintains.

The research yielded limitations. With the literature review, sources were quoted from authors in larger size departments, smaller departments, and localities with various types of fire department compositions. Some literature sources originated from departments that operate with only career personnel; MFD is a combination department, one that functions with paid personnel and volunteers. A portion of the referenced sources of literature was from agencies that only provide EMS services. In such circumstances, sources, effects, and management of personnel conflict may not be representative of fire service agencies. Furthermore, sources from the external environment were selected. This yields a limitation that may reflect biased outcomes that are not relevant to fire department organizations.
During the research, the action research method was used. Elements of the process included a) Rechecking the problem statement for clarity and comprehensiveness. The chosen problem statement was that conflict frequently occurs among departmental firefighters. The problem statement clearly defines the overall problem that initiated the research paper. The statement comprehensively requires action research for optimal solution and strategies for the problem. b) Establishing a broad goal. The project’s purpose statement is the overall goal. The purpose of this research project is to develop strategies for managing conflict within the department. Therefore, the goal is to produce conflict management strategies. c) Conducting a situational analysis to determine causal and contributing factors and existing situational forces likely to assist in reaching the goal. The situational analysis is summarized in the section labeled “Background and Significance” and represents departmental symptoms that led to the research project. Contributing factors are researched and noted in the literature review. d) Defining and prioritizing strategy. Helpful forces for understanding reasons for conflict were identified and outlined in the literature review. e) Setting objectives. For each research question, insight was gained in order to arrive at strategies for managing conflict. f) Developing step-by-step action plans for the overall objective. As strategies are unveiled for managing conflict, the same will be presented in the appendix of this research paper. g) Implementing the plan. After production of conflict management strategies that are applicable for Martinsville Fire Department, the strategies will be implemented by departmental management. The success of the research paper hinges around implementation. h) Evaluating outcomes. The effectiveness of the success of identified conflict management strategies cannot be performed until sufficient time
passes. However, a technique for evaluation can be determined in advance. The evaluation technique will consist of feedback from departmental employees, company officers, and management. Additionally, signs of conflict can be visualized and monitored as a final evaluation tactic.

**Definition of Terms**

*Advanced life support (ALS):* patient care procedures that go above-and-beyond basic lifesaving interventions. Examples include procedures such as advanced airway techniques, placing specialized equipment on a patient, and other unique maneuvers that require a high level of expertise.

*Attendant-in charge:* the emergency medical care technician that is in charge of all patient care measures.

*Combination department:* a term used to describe a fire department that is comprised of both paid and volunteer personnel.

*Company officer:* a fire department officer with the rank of Lieutenant or Captain who supervises firefighters.

*Fire ground:* the location of a fire scene such as a building, house, or other location.

*Group-cohesiveness:* a term used to describe the interaction of people within a group. A high level of cohesiveness indicates a strong bond among group members while a low level of cohesiveness reflects that group members do not work closely together or do not share a common-bond.
RESULTS

In the research project, three research questions were identified based upon the problem statement and purpose of the research. In this section, results of the literature review are organized by research question.

**Research Question #1 - What are possible causes of personnel conflict within the fire service?**

Many causes of personnel conflict, in the fire service and in scenarios involving personnel, were identified. Nehnevajsa and Wernette (1988) offered three variables that often lead to personnel conflict. The variables include role conflict, role performance degradation or role abandonment, and the present functioning of the particular emergency response organization. The resultant conflict at the personal level, if progressing, leads to negative implications and continued conflict within the organization as a whole. The same authors also point out that conflict may be caused by conflicting demands such as contradictory orders from multiple supervisors or commanders.

Disputes among people progress to additional personality conflicts according to Shanaberger (1989). Bateman and Snell (1996) comment on conflict being a side effect of diverse work teams. The authors mention that tensions and anxieties are most likely to emerge as the diversity increases within groups.

Conflict is sparked by competition for limited resources (Kreitner and Kinicki, 1998). Once conflict begins in such situations, and then continues without being resolved, future conflict is likely without intervention. A conflict, as mentioned, may continue into an indefinite period of time.
Glover (2001) identifies another possible cause of conflict, relationships. Personnel that often work together develop relationships due to the amount of time spent together in the workplace. Relationships are a two-way street, with possible favorable effects and on the other end of the continuum, disastrous relationships than invoke evident signs of conflict.

**Research Question #2: What is the impact of conflict among the human resources of the fire service?**

White (1991) indicates that conflict can have positive outcomes if managed properly. Advantages of conflict include issue clarification and policy elucidation. Per White, whether the conflict outcomes are positive or negative are dependent upon the skills of either one or both of the involved parties.

Kofodimos (1995) lists several effects of conflict. Among the effects, include stress, tension, confusion, and irritability. Further and at the extreme, hostilities even may be an effect of conflict. The International Association of Fire Chiefs (1993) issues another effect of conflict. Firefighters may use a conflicting situation to purposefully and maliciously disrupt labor interests between firefighters and the Fire Chief. Such endeavors may end with a lack of confidence in the Fire Chief and even accusations of negligence.

The International Association of Fire Chiefs (1993) offers that organizational change is an effect of conflict. Simply put, during occurrences of conflict, the fire department may retaliate or counter with some type of change that serves the sole purpose of resolving the conflict at hand. In the same literature source, new Fire Chiefs
are vulnerable to intentional and wanton conflict, especially chiefs hired from outside the particular department.

In 1999, Ivancevich and Matteson categorized conflict in two different effects. First, there is conflict known as functional conflict. This is manifested as an enhancement of the organization’s performance after being faced with some type of conflicting situation. Such conflict is acted upon favorably, by the department, resulting in a positive outcome. Second, another effect of conflict is dysfunctional conflict whereas an organization develops a problem from the actual conflict.

Filley (1975) points out that conflict delivers advantages as an effect. There may be strengthening of group members that causes the group members to be more cohesive. Group performance may be a final product of such conflict. Another effect may be a new level of work by the group, such as a higher standard. Next, conflict may serve as a barrier that filters or mitigates more serious, future, conflict. The end-result may be due to strengthening of group members because of the conflict that was undergone previously. Finally, innovative solutions and programs may be achieved following conflict.

**Research Question #3: What are recommended strategies for managing conflict within the department?**

The purpose of this research project was to develop strategies for managing conflict within the department. The literature review was helpful in suggesting strategies that are often useful for managing conflict. Coleman (1991) offers suggestions that chiefs can initiate to avoid problems associated with conflict. Coleman points out that a
chief should not retreat and become isolated following a conflicting problem, but rather a face-to-face approach. Coleman’s second suggestion is that chief officers should not hide conflict from their respective supervisor.

Sashkin (1989) publishes three vital steps that fire departments can take to manage conflict. The steps are as follows:

1. Understand the cycles of conflict.
2. Discover your conflict style and understand the implications of the style.
3. Deal with the conflict. Use a problem-solving strategy.

Sashkin utilizes the following graphical illustration to highlight the strategy:

**Diagram 1**

**Strategies for Dealing with Conflict**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concern for Others</th>
<th>Concern for Self</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Avoiding</strong> (withdrawing)</td>
<td><strong>Fighting</strong> (win-lose)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bargaining</strong> (splitting the difference)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Smoothing</strong> (agreeing to disagree)</td>
<td><strong>Problem-Solving</strong> (facing the issues together)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The diagram by Sashkin recommends that leaders use a high degree of concern for others as well as a high degree of concern for self. Sashkin also lists an eight-step guide for dealing with conflicting situations. The eight steps include:

**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eight-Step Procedures for Dealing with Conflict</th>
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<td>1. Present the issue unemotionally, and seek the other party’s help.</td>
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<td>4. Give your point of view.</td>
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<td>5. Jointly develop an objective or condition on which both parties can agree.</td>
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<td>7. Jointly choose one alternative as a tentative solution.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Jointly decide how each party will know if the solution is working.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

The (ICMA) International City/County Management Association (2000) offers two strategies for managing conflict within combination fire departments.

1. **Integration Strategy**: for use when conflict is low. The strategy is recommended when firefighters get-along well, generally speaking. With such a strategy, volunteer and career firefighters are intermingled during training, fire suppression, and fund raising, etc.

2. **Federation Strategy**: for use when conflict is high. The strategy divides management powers among the career chief and volunteer officers. The literature does issue a cautionary disclaimer in that the federation strategy
demands extraordinary, additional management skill when compared to a simple system such as the integration strategy.

Gardner and Taigman (1996) suggest two types of skills for managing conflict, mega skills and technical skills. Mega skills must be developed, prior to the conflicting situation and, be immediately available as needed to remedy the conflict. The technical skills include effective listening, developing a perspective for the conflict, and then affecting closure to the conflicting problem.

Glover (2001) unveils five steps for managing conflict. Glover’s strategy involves mediation, as follows:

**Table 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Glover’s Five Steps for Managing Conflict with the Mediation Process</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Introduction:</strong> the mediator sets the stage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Storytelling:</strong> a time for people to be heard and share perceptions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Generating Options:</strong> to engage the parties in a creative and collaborative discussion about remedies for resolution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. Resolution:</strong> affirms and clarifies the personal effort obtained through mediation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5. Closure:</strong> a time to acknowledge the parties for resolving the problem and reaffirming the agreement.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bateman and Snell (1996) issue framework encompassing five strategies for dealing with conflict. Illustrated next, the five strategies include competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating. Each method involves varying degrees of assertiveness.
Diagram 2: Bateman and Snell’s Conflict Management Strategies

Cooperativeness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assertive</th>
<th>Unassertive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competing</td>
<td>Avoiding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborating</td>
<td>Accommodating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compromising</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Collaborating is a technique that emphasizes both cooperation and assertiveness, and the goal is to maximize satisfaction of both parties portraying the conflict.

Compromising is known as only moderate attention to both parameters and yields only a satisfice, but no real tangible outcome to the conflict. Avoiding is a false presumption that takes a hands-off approach. The conflict remains as is unless it vanishes on its own accord. Accommodating is a cooperative approach by both parties but lacks any assertiveness as to any person’s own interest. Bateman and Snell do not advocate any sole strategy, but recommend a contingency approach that would allow the situation to dictate exactly which strategy that yields the optimal solution for the given conflict.

The literature review offered specific answers to each research question, as outlined in the preceding text. Possible causes of personnel conflict were brought forward, and the impact of conflict among the human resources of the fire service was
identified. The literature review identified various strategies for managing conflict within a fire department. With the aforementioned data that was gathered, three appendices were developed. Each appendix, a product for fulfillment of the overall development of strategies for managing conflict, is briefly summarized next.

Appendix A is thus created and tilted “Steps for Managing Conflict within the Fire Service, as follows:

Diagram 3

Steps for Managing Conflict within the Fire Service
Appendix A

- Preparing
- Preventing
- Resolving

Appendix A serves the sole purpose of a quick visual reference for the necessary steps for fire departments to use when managing conflict. The first step is preparing for anticipated conflict. Fire officials should make a diligent effort to prepare for and anticipate conflict. Preventing conflict is the second step. Fire leaders are encouraged to initiate maneuvers to prevent dysfunctional conflict. Finally, when conflict requires direct involvement for resolution, the resolving stage is necessary.
Appendix B, Steps for Managing Conflict within the Fire Service, an Implementation Guide, is a detailed representation for implementing a campaign for managing conflict. Due to the complexity of Appendix B, the same is featured in its entirety in the said appendix. In short, fire officials could thereby follow the detailed guide for the conflict management process.

Realizing that fire officers will occasionally be involved with an actual conflict resolution scenario, Appendix C, Step-by-Step Guide for Resolving Conflict within the Fire Service, is created. In summary, Appendix C’s purpose is for use when actually dealing with specific conflict. The guide considers that the preparing and preventing steps have been incorporated, but the conflict requires further effort for resolution.

DISCUSSION

After analyzing the research, specific findings are linked to each research question. The author’s interpretation is then presented. Finally, organizational implications are stated.

There are vast causes that often lead to personnel conflict as identified within the literature review. Nehnevajsa and Wernette (1988) list three variables that may spur conflict. First, there is role conflict. In the fire service and notably in the Martinsville Fire Department, this type of conflict is often seen. A group of firefighters may be assigned to a project, such as annual hose testing. While performing the task, two or more firefighters may have different ideas of how to successfully complete the task. The subsequent role ambiguity then develops into a full-blown conflicting situation whereas tempers may flair if unresolved.
Second, Nehnevajsa and Wernette (1988) list role abandonment while the third variable is the particular efficiency of the organization at the given time. In the scenario above, a conflict during annual hose testing, the conflict, if severe enough, may cause a firefighter to withdraw from the task. This effect may be much more synergistic if the organization is experiencing conflict, at-large, within the department. The work of Nehnevajsa and Wernette is a reminder to fire service leaders that conflict is going to occur regardless of the situation due to firefighters often in situations that lead to varying views of accomplishing the same task. Also, fire service leaders should make it a high priority to maintain tranquility within the organization to maximize departmental efficiency.

The literature review uncovered additional causes of personnel conflict. Shanaberger (1989) offers that disputes mask other secondary, conflicting issues. Shanaberger adds that someone’s job, competence, and financial wellbeing may suffer as a result of the initial conflict. Fire service leaders should focus on dealing with conflict, not ignoring it.

Kreitner and Kinicki (1998) suggest that competition for limited resources is a cause of conflict. Within the Martinsville Fire Department, often immediately following promotions, conflict is often the by-product. This, in essence, is competing for limited resources. In a promotional situation, there is only one position that is to be filled, a limited resource. The firefighters may spend an entire career working towards the promotion, to have the dream shattered when a peer receives the nod. Therefore, there is a catalyst for conflict that cannot be eliminated.
Glover (2001) makes an interesting observation. Glover points out that relationships may cause conflict. Firefighters that spend long, numerous shifts together develop subsequent relationships. The relationships may take the form of a friendly one or a conflicting one. Firefighters have been observed experiencing conflict after working numerous years together. With the time spent together, the effects of the conflict could be minimized or even more severe. Fire service leaders are encouraged to consider the strength of firefighter relationships when dealing with personnel conflict. A strong relationship stands a higher probability of being resolved while a weak relationship may require separation of the firefighters to avoid continued conflict.

As expected, the literature review revealed several causes of conflict that were expected. Among them included role conflict, competition for limited resources, and relationships. There was one potential cause that was unexpected, the status of the work environment. This is a key reminder to fire service officers that the work environment must be heavily monitored for early signs of conflict. Such visible conflict, since possessing the potential of escalating future conflict, must be eradicated.

Firefighters of the Martinsville Fire Department often exhibit certain effects after facing conflicting situations. Among the effects include short tempers, irritability, signs of stress, and acts of retaliation. The literature review affirmed some of the visible signs and suggested additional effects of conflict.

White (1991) stated that conflict often has positive outcomes. White’s work reflected that conflict may be an opportunity to clarify issues, policies, or to clarify misunderstandings among personnel. Glover (2001) recommends a strategy utilizing a trained mediator to resolve a conflict. In Glover’s strategy, a part of the mediator’s
routine is to allow all parties involved in the conflict to clarify all issues leading to the problem. The writings of both White and Glover support each other in that issues may be resolved due to the generated dialogue of the conflict resolution process. This is encouragement for fire officers in that conflict negotiations are vital in the conflict resolution process.

Kofodimos (1995) issues the descriptors stress, irritability, confusion, tension, and hostilities to describe the effects of conflict. As previously stated, personnel of the Martinsville Fire Department show these same effects after facing and experiencing conflict. After Kofodimos’ readings, the witnessed observations appear to be normal in nature due to personnel conflict.

Organizational change is often a by-product of conflict (International Association of Fire Chiefs, 1993). Of course, the change process could be a positive outcome or one that is not so glorious. If a conflict initiates an organizational change for the good of the department, conflict is to be credited for the success story. However, it is fair to say that conflict could have devastating effects for the sake of the department.

Ivancevich and Matteson (1999) issue two specific categories of conflict effects, functional and dysfunctional. First, functional conflict is a positive, direct impact of conflict. Such an outcome could be similar to positive organizational change as discussed in the article by the International Association of Fire Chiefs. Second, dysfunctional conflict is comparable to the negative implications of conflict, such as the tension, stress, and hostilities that have been experienced within the department.

Filley (1975) reflected that conflict often spurs in-group cohesiveness. In such an event, group members may become personally closer, thus improving organizational
performance. One point not mentioned by Filley is that an increase in group-cohesiveness may cause problems for fire officials. Specifically, a group that is so cohesive and bonded may stick together so tightly that a fire officer may not be able to alter the group’s perception or behavior to eliminate the conflict.

In the literature review, published effects of conflict were reflective of the pattern and type of conflict that is demonstrated within the Martinsville Fire Department. Therefore, conflict has the potential of producing favorable and negative effects. Fire service officers must focus on the positive effects and understand that negative effects are likely in certain scenarios. Next, conflict management strategies are examined.

After reading the work of several authors from fire service publications, emergency-related magazines, and college-level management textbooks, there are favorable strategies that can be implemented for conflict management. Coleman (1991) offers a key suggestion for fire chiefs, facing the conflict. Coleman’s pointer is derived from the opinion that when choosing to face the conflict, head-on, a stronger relationship is likely to develop.

Sashkin (1989) gives three critical steps that departments can take to constructively manage conflict. Such steps include:

- Understanding the cycles of conflict.
- Discovering your conflict style.
- Dealing with the conflict.

Sashkin and Glover (2001) both agree that discovering your personal conflict style is imperative for successful conflict resolution. A tactic to understand the dominant conflict management style is completion of the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument or
other similarly designed tool (Glover, 2001). Completion of an instrument for the stated purpose is included in the recommendations of this research paper (Appendix B).

Sashkin (1989) identifies an eight-step procedural model for dealing with conflict, as in the following table:

Table 1

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Glover (2001) uses a five-step model for conflict management closure, as illustrated in Table 2:
Sashkin’s method and Glover’s tactics both possess merit and encompass favorable methods for managing conflict in the fire department.

Glover (2001) incorporates the use of a trained mediator into the Glover model. Since the fire service has conflict among its personnel, the use of a mediator is an alternative strategy that has favorable potential if traditional methods do not successfully provide closure to the situation at-hand.

As a conclusion to the section, there is a menu of strategies for managing conflict. The study results offered promising strategies, and the same were introduced into Appendix A (Steps for Managing Conflict within the Fire Service), Appendix B (Steps for Managing Conflict Within the Fire Service, an Implementation Guide), and Appendix C (Step-by-step Guide for Resolving Conflict Within the Fire Service) after assimilation, incorporating the work of Sashkin and Glover, and the subjective opinions of the author of this research paper. A final interpretation of the literature review is that conflict management in the public sector is closely paralleled to the way that fire service leaders
should work to manage conflict. An implication for fire service agencies and MFD is that further approaches to conflict management may be borrowed from such private sources.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The problem is that conflict frequently occurs among departmental firefighters. Such conflict results in various effects, and the purpose of this research project is to develop strategies for managing conflict within the department. Based upon each research question and the extensive literature review at the National Fire Academy’s Learning Resource Center, examination of fire service publications, review of other emergency service related magazines, and analysis of college-level, managerial books, the results of such research yielded relevant material for the following recommendations.

Research Question #1 - What are possible causes of personnel conflict within the fire service?

The research offered many possibilities for direct causes of conflict. Such causes include role conflict, role abandonment, and an unstable work environment. An additional cause of conflict is an unresolved dispute that escalates into further conflict. Next, competition for limited resources is a possibility such as when firefighters show sign of conflict, towards each other, following a promotion or other opportunity that is not capable of rewarding all parties.

Relationships that develop, over time, is another potential cause of personnel conflict. With firefighters working closely so often, the relationship then may have certain effects that lead to conflict. If unresolved, the conflict may progress to the point
that tempers flare, tension mounts, stress prevails, irritability sets-in, and/or workplace violence. In summary, effects of personnel conflict varies from one end of the continuum whereas personnel are barely affected to the opposite end of the continuum whereas physical confrontations may erupt.

Regarding the future, it is recommended that firefighters and all fire officers complete training in conflict recognition and management. Fire officers must expect certain levels and instances of personnel conflict. Such officials must engage in agency and personal preparation in anticipation of conflicting circumstances. Additionally, preventive measures should be established, in order to mitigate and minimize the effects of personnel conflict. The aforementioned recommendations are noted for the sole purpose of allowing fire officers to more effectively understand the effects of conflict and to reduce the impact of the same.

Another measure for future consideration is a survey instrument that polls departmental firefighters, thus an effort to identify specific causes of in-house, personnel conflict. The insight could then be utilized to customize conflict management measures that are directly specific to the localized effects.

**Research Question #2: What is the impact of conflict among the human resources of the fire service?**

Personnel conflict has two types of effects, positive and negative. The research reflected that positive fruits of conflict are frequently beneficial by clarifying issues, policies, and misunderstandings among personnel. Organizational change may be the by-product of conflict. A situation that leads to conflict may initiate an organizational
alteration that never would have occurred if not for the personnel being afforded the opportunity to communicate. Also, there is a category labeled as functional conflict. The latter is a conflicting situation that has a positive, direct effect. However, research also pointed out negative effects of conflict, dysfunctional conflict.

After considering the possible effects of conflict, it is recommended that fire leaders do two things. First, work with and maximize the effects of positive conflict. When a situation prevails that allows one to take the lessons learned and then mold the same into a tangible, meaningful event, then do so. Second, company officers and executive officers should launch efforts to prepare for and prevent negative conflict. Included in the recommendation is for managers to not only complete conflict awareness and management training, but to actively monitor the work environment for countermeasures to soften the negative effects of conflict. The task is achievable by addressing the needs of firefighters, frequent communication and shift meetings, and a direct, head-on approach to deal specifically with conflicting issues.

**Research Question #3: What are recommended strategies for managing conflict within the department?**

The research offered many strategies for effectively managing conflict. Examples include the eight-steps noted by Sashkin, Glover’s Five-Step Model, and Bateman and Snell’s framework containing five conflict management styles. After careful consideration of the answers to research questions one and two, the following phases of recommendations are made, collectively, including the above recommendations:
1. **Preparing Phase**

   - Offer conflict awareness training for all departmental personnel. Included should encompass basic techniques for handling and experiencing conflict.

   - Require conflict management, supervisory-level training for all company officers and fire-service executive level officers.

   - Departmental officers should complete an instrument to determine the personal, dominant style of conflict management.

   - Contract with a provider for an employee assistance program in anticipation of requiring such services.

   - Identify a trained mediator for use in resolving conflicts that leave department personnel in deadlock.

2. **Preventing Phase**

   - Fire officers should consciously work towards provision of an environment that fosters an open and friendly atmosphere, one that incorporates a high-level of camaraderie.

   - Eradicate dysfunctional conflict the moment that it is apparent, a move that prevents further conflict.

   - Perform an internal assessment of the department to analyze the potential causes of dysfunctional conflict and any conflict that requires intervention by management.

   - Demonstrate a high degree of concern for others as well as self.
• Incorporate an integrated strategy into the day-to-day management of the department. Since the department is a combination department, volunteer officers should be involved with relevant managerial decision-making, when feasible.

3. Resolving Phase

• Deal with conflict using a problem-solving strategy. Do not ignore the situation unless it is deemed appropriate to utilize the avoidance strategy of conflict management.

• Use the following table, Table 3, also duplicated in Appendix C to resolve the conflict:
### Table 3

**Conflict Management Strategy for Fire Personnel**

1. **Assemble relevant parties.**

2. **Storytelling time.** Allow involved parties to present the issue(s), unemotionally.

3. **Clarify and define the issues.**

4. **Ensure that all parties have expressed their interests.**

5. **Generate options.** Allow parties to develop collaborative solutions that everyone agrees upon.

6. **Brainstorm all possible alternatives.**

7. **Jointly select the optimal solution.**

8. **Resolution.** The company officer or fire executive officer should affirm the solution by summarizing the mutual agreement.

9. **Closure.** Jointly determine a method for monitoring the remedy and ensuring that the solution is continually effective.

10. **In the event of a deadlock, call upon a mediator.**

### Future Implications

With the above-mentioned recommendations, awareness training is the first step in effectively managing conflict within the fire department. However, the effectiveness should be monitored and re-examined over time and when the situation dictates. The implemented recommendations should be reevaluated after one year, then biannually thereafter. Modifications and/or additional training may have to be incorporated to
ensure an environment that has little or no dysfunctional conflict and overall gratification of departmental personnel.

Further research is needed. A survey instrument should be distributed to all departmental personnel in order to gain a stronger understanding of specific causes of conflict and its associated effects. Benchmarking with other similar-sized and compatible composition departments is recommended for further insight and possible strategies. Frequent monitoring is vital to assess the success or weaknesses of the given recommendations. Lessons learned should be incorporated with the goal of nurturing a work environment with minimal conflict and an atmosphere of mutual respect.
REFERENCES


Appendix A

Steps for Managing Conflict within the Fire Service
Steps for Managing Conflict within the Fire Service

Preparing

Preventing

Resolving
Appendix B

Steps for Managing Conflict within the Fire Service, an Implementation Guide
Steps for Managing Conflict within the Fire Service
(an implementation guide)

1. Preparing

   A. Firefighters, company officers, and chief level officers should complete
      training in conflict awareness. Such training should, at a minimum,
      include causes of conflict, departmental effects and implications of
      conflict, and hands-on methods and strategies for managing conflict.
   B. Fire personnel must realize that conflict among the human resources of the
      fire department is inevitable and a naturally occurring phenomenon.
   C. Company officers and chief level officers are recommended to complete
      an evaluatory, personal assessment, such as the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict
      Mode Instrument. The same will allow the officer to know his/her
      particular, dominant style for dealing with conflict, implications of the
      style, and other alternative methods for managing subsequent conflict.
   D. An employee assistance program shall be established for those scenarios
      that cannot be resolved.
   E. Trained mediators shall be located, and a list of mediators, with personal
      contact information, should be conspicuously made available for those
      situations that require further effort.

2. Preventing

   A. Fire leaders should work towards providing an environment that is
      friendly, open, and one that has a sense of camaraderie.
   B. The moment that signs of dysfunctional conflict are identified, the
      problem should be addressed.
   C. Fire officers are encouraged to perform an internal assessment of the
      department. This assessment should be visual, and frequent conferences
      with company officers are recommended. Signs and sources of conflict
      should be watched for while in station quarters and during dialog with
      firefighters and company officers.
   D. Demonstrate a high degree of concern for others as well as yourself.
   E. Incorporate an integrated strategy into the common, day-to-day
      management of the department. Since Martinsville Fire Department is a
      combination department, volunteer officers should be involved with
      managerial decision-making, when possible.

3. Resolving

   A. Deal with the conflict. Use a problem-solving strategy. Do not ignore the
      situation unless it is deemed appropriate to utilize the avoidance theory of
      conflict management.
Once conflict occurs and interaction is required:

B. A fire official such as a company officer or executive-level officer should gather all parties that are experiencing the conflict, in a single room within a distraction-free atmosphere.

C. Storytelling time. Allow involved parties to present the issue(s), unemotionally.

D. Clarify and define the issue(s).

E. Ensure that all parties have expressed their interests.

F. Generate options. Allow the parties to jointly develop collaborative solutions that everyone agrees upon.

G. Brainstorm all possible alternatives.

H. Jointly select the optimal solution.

I. Resolution. The company officer or executive officer should affirm the solution by summarizing the mutual agreement.

J. Closure. Jointly determine a method for monitoring the remedy and ensuring that the solution continually is effective.

K. In the event of a deadlock, if a solution cannot be reached, call upon the professional services of a trained mediator.
Appendix C

Step-by-step Guide for Resolving Conflict within the Fire Service
# Step-by-step Guide for Resolving Conflict within the Fire Service

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