

**STRATEGIC PLANNING: THE DANE COUNTY FIRE CHIEFS ASSOCIATION'S  
PURSUIT TOWARDS ORGANIZATIONAL DIRECTION AND DEVELOPMENT**

EXECUTIVE DEVELOPMENT

By: Paul Menches  
Dane County Regional Airport  
Madison, Wisconsin

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

## ABSTRACT

The problem was that the Dane County Fire Chiefs Association (DCFCA) did not have a strategic plan on how to go about getting different county departments focused towards a common direction and mission. The purpose of this research study was to assess the organization's readiness and commitment towards planning, define the key elements of strategic planning, and solicit membership input in developing such a plan. This was a descriptive research project in which the following research questions were proposed:

1. What are the benefits of strategic planning for the fire service?
2. Is the DCFCA ready to begin a project of planned change?
3. Which basic elements should be included in the DCFCA's approach towards strategic planning?
4. What is the memberships' feedback towards such elements of strategic planning?

The procedures included forming a strategic planning steering committee empowered to develop and facilitate a detailed questionnaire. The questionnaire was then distributed to all member departments in order to obtain feedback. Feedback received was analyzed and interpreted for implementation by members of the committee.

The results were: The research identified there are distinct benefits associated with strategic planning within the fire service. In addition, it identified both a need for strategic planning and the basic elements necessary for such a plan. It also further substantiated that the DCFCA's readiness to plan may not be at the level required for taking on such an initiative.

The recommendations, based on this study, were to identify the benefits and basic elements associated with strategic planning and then analyze whether or not the DCFCA could employ them into its organization. This could be accomplished by having the planning

committee direct the initiative by a) preparing the organization for planning b) formulating the basic elements associated with such a plan c) sharing feedback from the questionnaire with membership.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

“A fire department that knows where it is going, knows the environment in which it must operate, and has identified how to get there has the best chance of achieving its goals and desires” (Wallace, 1998, p. 1). The problem is that the Dane County Fire Chiefs Association does not have a strategic plan on how to go about getting different county departments focused towards a common direction and mission. The purpose of this research study is to develop the foundation for the association’s strategic plan by assessing the organization’s readiness and commitment towards planning, by defining the key elements of an effective strategic plan, and by soliciting membership input in developing such a plan. This is a descriptive research project in which the following research questions are proposed:

1. What are the benefits of strategic planning for the fire service?
2. Is the DCFCA ready to begin a project of planned change?
3. Which basic elements should be included in the DCFCA’s approach towards strategic planning?
4. What is the memberships’ feedback towards such elements of strategic planning?

## **BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE**

The Dane County Fire Chiefs Association (DCFCA) was formed in 1977. It is a non-profit organization comprised of two full-time, eleven combination, and seventeen volunteer departments within Dane County, Wisconsin. Dane County encompasses over 1,238 square miles with a population of 426,500, and is located in the south central part of the state. It is also the seat of state government, where the City of Madison is located.

The DCFCA’s goals are 1) bringing together the Fire Chiefs of the various fire departments of Dane County for the purpose of effecting ways and means for the betterment of

the Fire Service; 2) reducing the unnecessary loss of life and property from fires; 3) to exchange ideas on all questions affecting the safety of life and property; and 4) to provide mutual assistance to one another in case of an emergency beyond the scope of the local fire department (Appendix A).

At the present time, the Dane County Fire Chiefs Association does not have a strategic plan on how to go about accomplishing its goals. There is no real long-term planning process other than what members discuss or what committees bring up at each of the six scheduled meetings each year (January, March, May, July, September, and November). The meetings follow *Roberts Rules of Order*, in which the basic meeting format is comprised of call to order; roll call; secretary's report; treasurer's report; introduction of new members and guests; committee reports; old business; and new business (Appendix B). This provides information on a year-to-year basis but does not provide an opportunity for the organization to develop a clear vision on managing for change. Organizations that continue in this type of vacuum cannot prosper and grow because they are reduced to keeping things the way they have always been (Snyder and Graves, 1994). Fire service organizations that want to survive and prosper must respond to changes such as demographics shifts, privatization of public services, tax levy limits, tax indexing, and unfunded federal mandates (Bryson, 1995).

Due to the lack of strategic planning in the past, the DCFCA has not developed a strategic direction. This lack of strategic direction has limited the organization from employing its diversity and reaching its true potential. The objective of successful strategic planning is to help organizations of all sizes and types plan and implement strategies in an efficient, holistic, and integrated manner -- in short, to become high-performance organizations (Haines, 1995).

The importance of this study is an attempt to develop a strategic planning process that the Dane County Fire Chiefs Association can employ in creating a proactive future in order to manage change. Proactive futuring involves identifying and taking actions today that will move the organization closer to its ideal future (Wallace, 1998).

This applied research project relates to the “Strategic Planning” module taught in the Executive Planning Course. An enabling objective of strategic planning is “given the task of participating in a strategic planning effort, be able to identify the driving force of the organization” (National Fire Academy [NFA], 1995, p. 4-1). “Organizations response may be to do what they have always done, only better; it may also involve important shifts in organizational focus and action (Bryson, 1995, p. 3).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Providing a foundation for this research is the purpose of the literature review. At the center of the review are four questions that need to be addressed.

Question one: What are the benefits of strategic planning for the fire service?

Strategic planning is a tool to help an organization do a better job – to focus its energy, to ensure that members of the organization are working toward the same goals, to assess and adjust the organization’s direction in response to a changing environment (American Express, 2001a). In short, strategic planning is a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization is, what it does, and why it does it, with a focus on the future (Bryson, 1995).

The benefit of the strategic planning process is that it assists an organization in creating a future it desires by 1) converting a rule driven organization into value driven one; 2) dealing with decisions that affects the future and weighs alternatives in light of risks; 3) providing



documentation that long term planning has been employed to produce strategy; 4) providing a reference point for evaluating progress; and 5) understanding the gap between the actual situation and what's required (Wallace, 1998). Strategic planning provides a uniform vision and purpose that is shared throughout the organization, increasing the level of commitment to the organization and its goals (American Express, 2001b). An organization is strengthened when it has a common purpose and a sense of direction (Welsler, 2001). Communicating the purpose and direction to members create improved communications throughout the entire organization.

Finally, strategic planning impacts organizations with its ability to set priorities and match resources to opportunities (American Express, 2001b). Planned resources provide the finances and personnel an organization needs to succeed in achieving future direction (National Fire Academy [NFA], 1998, p. 4-5).

Question two: Is the Dane County Fire Chiefs Association ready to begin a project of planned change?

There must be a compelling reason to undertake strategic planning, otherwise the process is not likely to be worth the effort. (Bryson, 1995). "To reinvent itself, an organization must first uncover its hidden context. Only when an organization is threatened, losing momentum, or eager to break new ground will it confront its past and begin to understand why it must break with its outmoded present" (Goss, Pascale and Athos, 1993, p. 98).

It may be desirable to do a quick assessment of the organization's readiness to engage in strategic planning. If an organization is in trouble, or if its in the middle of a change effort, lack of trust automatically emerges as a serious barrier (Duck, 1993). "The assessment should cover the organization's current mission; its budget, human resources, and communications systems; its leadership and management capabilities; the expected costs and benefits of a strategic

planning process; how to overcome any unexpected barriers; and the ability of leadership and management to plan and execute strategic plans” (Bryson, 1995, p. 57). Based on this assessment, the organization may decide to push ahead, focus on improving its readiness, or drop the effort all together (Bryson, 1995). It is useless to devote resources to a strategic plan when memberships’ focus is on dealing with immediate problems.

The key element for successful planning is to remember that planning is a major management function (Wallace, 1998). Therefore, if planning is to be done effectively, top management must begin the process, which then proceeds down through all levels of the organization’s structure (Ellis and Pekar, 1980). “The organization must be committed to ongoing planning” (Menkin, 1997, p. 29). The challenge for today’s leaders in the fire service is to create a vision for the future and make it happen (Wallace, 1998). Creating a proactive organization that is receptive to change is the only chance the fire service has to stay on the leading edge, both in terms of technology and services to the community (Wallace, 1998).

During the planning process, undoubtedly questions emerged that must be answered (Wallace, 1998):

1. How much commitment to a planning process is present?
2. Who should be involved in the planning process?
3. How should the planning process fit into the organization’s fiscal year?
4. How long will the process take?
5. What information is needed to plan successfully?
6. Who is going to develop data?

Finally, “strategic planning for public or nonprofit organization is likely to work best if the organization has an effective policy-making body in place to oversee the effort. Any important limitations or boundaries on the effort should be made clear” (Bryson, 1995, p. 26).

Question three: Which basic elements should be included in the Association’s approach towards strategic planning?

“Strategic planning consists of creating a future for an organization by discovering organizational purpose (why do we exist?), developing organizational values, creating a vision for the future and developing strategies to achieve that future state” (Tauber, 2001, p. 6).

In his book, *Successful Strategic Planning*, Stephen Haines proposes using backward thinking to begin creating the ideal future. By beginning at the desired outcomes and working backward an organization employs “proactive futuring”, the type of thinking required for strategic planning (Wallace, 1998). In this process, author Haines points out there are three critical tasks that an organization must perform: 1) develop a vision statement identifying the shared hopes, dreams, and images of the future; 2) draft a mission statement answering why the organization exists, what business it’s in, whom it serves, and how it operates; and 3) articulate the core values that guide the organization’s day-to-day behavior and creates the organizational culture.

Vision is a definition of the future state of the organization, and in its completed form it describes what the organization seeks to do and become (National Fire Academy [NFA], 1997). The organization develops a description of what it should look like once it has successfully implemented its strategies and achieved its full potential (Bryson, 1995). Creating such a vision helps direct the change effort required in transforming the organization (Kotter, 1995).

“It is very difficult to plan for the future if the team is uncertain of where to start” (Menkin, 1997, p. 18). An organization’s mission, along with its mandates, provides the social justification for its existence (Bryson, 1995). An organization’s mission statement is a clear statement about what business the organization is in (Goodstein, Nolan, and Pfeiffer, 1992). Clarifying the purpose can eliminate a great deal of unnecessary conflict in an organization and can help channel discussion and activity efficiently (Terry, 1993). “An organization’s purpose defines the arenas within which the organization will collaborate or compete, and it charts the future course of the organization” (Bryson, 1995, p. 27). “If you don’t know where you’re going, how will you know when you get there?” (Lewis, 1997, p. 27). After it is created, the mission statement should be used to set goals and objectives and to make decisions (Lewis, 1997).

In *Principle-Centered Leadership*, Stephen Covey notes that today’s planning models call for recognition of the organization’s values. Values guide the day-to-day behaviors and collectively create the desired culture of the organization (Haines, 1995). In addition, they are “enduring and consistent over time and are driven by, and crystallized from, top leadership in the entity” (Haines, 1995, p. 34).

Once an organization has committed to why it exists and what it does, it must now take a clear-eye look at its current situation and surrounding environment. Environmental scanning is the process of surveying all environmental factors which have a reasonable potential for affecting the organization from achieving its mission, and then using the information in strategic planning (Fleming, 1996). By continually scanning and surveying the environment, the organization obtains information that is needed in strategic planning. In SWOT analysis,

(acronym for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats), the information gained in Environmental Scanning is put to use (Fleming, 1996).

The planning committee should explore the environment outside the organization to identify both opportunities and threats. “Opportunities and threats can be discovered by monitoring a variety of political, economic, social, technological, educational, and physical environmental forces and trends” (Bryson, 1995, p. 28). Attention to these external factors can be used to identify success factors; things an organization must do in order to be successful in relating to its external environment (Bryson, 1995).

In addition, an organization should also explore its internal environment to identify both its strengths and weaknesses (Bryson, 1995). In identifying its internal strengths and weaknesses, an organization can monitor its resources, its present strategy, and its performance (Bryson, 1995). Attention to these internal factors can be used to identify an organization’s “core competencies” (Prahalad and Hamel, 1990).

“Once the gap between the ideal future and the organization’s capacity to attain that future is manageable, an operational plan needs to be written for each line of business, and an action plan needs to be written by each functional unit” (Goodstein, Nolan, and Pfeiffer, 1992, p. 5). These operational plans must identify the “broad approaches to be taken (strategies), and the general and specific results to be sought (the goals and objectives)” (American Express, 2001c, p. 2). Each action plan must be checked against the mission statement and the organizational values to ensure the actions are consistent with what the organization envisions it becoming.

Question four: What is the memberships’ feedback towards such elements of strategic planning?

During the fall of 2002, the majority membership of the Dane County Fire Chiefs Association (DCFCA) was not aware of the basic elements required to pursue strategic planning.

Membership had an understanding that strategic planning, like any other form of planning, had a certain number of steps to define and follow through on. What they didn't understand was strategic planning, unlike any other form of planning, started with defining the future first and then working backwards to define the processes in attaining it (Haines, 1995). In other words, members were not aware of the present impact strategic planning had on creating the organization's future (Goodstein, Nolan, and Pfeiffer, 1992).

Because people support what they help create, organizations cannot plan in a vacuum (Haines, 1995). By getting membership to participate, people buy-in, understand, and commit to the process (Lewis, 1997). Therefore, it was decided by the strategic planning steering committee to employ the questionnaire both as a feedback instrument and learning tool. The questionnaire was drafted by addressing the basic elements of strategic planning into a question format and requiring members to respond back on how they perceived the status of the organization in relation to the basic elements. This allowed the committee to determine the memberships' understanding of the process and at the same time "develop an understanding of the members' perceptions of strengths and problems within the organization" (Minor, 1995, p.16). Actually feedback from the questionnaire will be further discussed during the results of the applied research.

In summary, based on this literature review, strategic planning is like no other type of planning. Its main focus is on creating the future now. The literature supports the many benefits strategic planning can bring an organization, only if an organization prepares itself for such proactive futuring (Wallace, 1998). Identifying the basic elements of strategic planning is only one part of the process. The basic elements must be identified and their meanings understood by all members of the organization.

## **PROCEDURES**

### **Forming Committee**

The Dane County Fire Chiefs Association (DCFCA) promotes the use of shared resources to maximize effectiveness during times of emergency and emergency preparedness while minimizing county departments' overall expenses, and while still supporting continued autonomy of fire districts. Its objectives are to bring county fire chiefs together for the purpose of improving fire protection through department cooperation, mutual aid, and the establishment of uniformed operation guidelines (Appendix A). Therefore in May 2002, the DCFCA decided it was time to explore the possibility of whether or not a quasa-type organization comprised of many entities could perform strategic planning.

Strategic planning is defined as the process by which the guiding members of an organization envision its future and develop the necessary procedures and operations to achieve that future (Goodstein, Nolan and Pfeiffer, 1989). A five-member committee was formed to explore the possibility and provide recommendations in September 2002. Members from full-time, combination, paid-on-call, and volunteer departments were selected to the committee. It is beneficial to include members from all levels of the organization; a team made up of a cross section of membership can assist management in the process and help sell the plan to the rest of the organization (Menkin, 1997).

### **Feedback Questionnaire Methodology**

During the summer of 2002, the committee met two times. At the first meeting Bob Van Etten, Fire Chief of the Monona Fire Department, shared with the committee a strategic planning process he implemented at his department in the late 1990s (Appendix C). This was very helpful because it defined vision, mission, and goals as key elements associated with strategic planning

(Wallace, 1998). In addition, it further defined the importance of conducting an environmental scan along with a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Analysis as part of the strategic planning process (Fleming, 1996).

A decision was made by the committee to develop a questionnaire. This questionnaire was drafted by addressing the major elements of strategic planning into a question format and requiring members to respond back on how they perceived the status of the organization in relation with strategic planning. This decision was made because “the organization must provide its own answers to a series of questions if it hopes to be able to plan properly” (Fire, 1997, p.78). If an organization overlooks information from its employees, it overlooks probably the most valuable source of customer information it has (Menkin, 1997).

A questionnaire form (Appendix D) comprised of ten questions, (question 8 was eliminated because it reiterated questions 1-4), was developed by employing information from Chief Van Etten’s strategic planning process and combining it with the Fire Department Strategic Planning Activities developed by Mark Wallace in his book: *Fire Department Strategic Planning: Creating Future Excellence (Appendix B)*. This style of research, employing a questionnaire to determine and report the present status of strategic planning, is referred to as descriptive research (NFA, 1998).

### **Population**

The questionnaire was distributed to all 30 member departments after it was presented and explained at the September 11, 2002 meeting. The questionnaire was designed to assess the current mindset of the members of the Dane County Fire Chiefs Association with regards to strategic planning. Distribution of the questionnaire was accomplished by e-mailing the



questionnaire to each department with a request that all chief officers complete it and return it to Chief Van Etten, no later than October 1, 2002 (Appendix D).

### **Statistical Analysis**

The results received from the questionnaire were gathered and presented using descriptive techniques. The feedback was organized, analyzed, and documented in each of the appropriate data collection activities (Appendix E). Each question was listed first, and then the feedback provided from membership was functional grouped together and placed under the appropriate question in a bullet format. Feedback that duplicated itself was only entered once.

### **Limitations and Assumptions**

The questionnaire was distributed to 100% of the DCFCA membership (30 departments). There were 17 responses to the questionnaire, which represented a 56.7% of the total targeted population. There were no attempts made, other than those mentioned above, to contact any non-respondents. Finally, it is assumed that all respondents answered honestly.

### **Definition of Terms**

DCFCA - Dane County Fire Chiefs Association.

Members - Those who participate in the Dane County Fire Chiefs Association.

Mission - Clear understanding of what an organization is; what it does; and for whom.

Strategic Planning - A management tool to help an organization manage change.

SWOT - Analysis of internal Strengths/Weaknesses and external Opportunities/Threats.

Values - An enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct is preferable.

Vision - Future state of an organization; describes what it seeks to do and become.

## RESULTS

This research produced a collection of data in support of the author's research questions, which focused on the benefits, preparation, elements, and feedback associated with strategic planning.

Research question one asks, "What are the benefits of strategic planning for the fire service?" Research identifies there are distinct benefits associated with strategic planning within the fire service (Mintzberg and Quinn, 1996). As research points out, the major benefit of strategic planning is that it's a disciplined effort that produces fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide an organization with a focus on the future. (Bryson, 1995).

In his book, *Fire Department Strategic Planning: Creating Future Excellence*, Mark Wallace points out one of the major benefits derived from strategic planning is proactive futuring. Here, the organization creates a future it desires by understanding the gap between the actual situation and what is required. From here, the organization then deals with decisions that affect the future by weighing the alternatives in light of the risks (Wallace, 1998).

There are many benefits the Dane County Fire Chiefs Association (DCFCA) can derive from proactive futuring. A strong benefit would be the development of common purpose and sense of direction that is not present throughout the entire organization. Setting priorities and focusing will help the DCFCA determine precise operational and budgeting priorities during the tough economic times that are forecasted for Dane County in the upcoming years.

Question two asks, "Is the Dane County Fire Chiefs Association ready to begin a project of planned change?"

"Undertaking a planning process without assessing the organization's readiness for planning is a shortcut to failure" (NFA, 1997, p. 3-7). Therefore, it is advantageous to assess the

DCFCA's readiness to engage in strategic planning. This assessment process must focus on the organization's mission and budget; expected costs and benefits of a strategic planning process; how to overcome any unexpected barriers; and the ability of leadership and management to plan and execute strategic plans (Bryson, 1995). Based on this assessment, the Dane County Fire Chiefs Association (DCFCA) must make a decision on whether to pursue further or regroup. This assessment, or lack of one, may further substantiate that the DCFCA's readiness to plan may not be at the level required for taking on such an initiative.

The key element for successful planning is to remember that it must start at the top and filter down throughout every level in the organization (Ellis and Pekar, 1980). "If the chief and other officers aren't committed to excellence, the process of strategic planning may never get the opportunity it needs" (Wallace, 1998, p. 45).

In addition, the DCFCA must also ensure the following issues are addressed before making the commitment to plan (American Express, 2001b):

1. A resolution of major crisis that may interfere with the long range thinking during, commitment to, and participation in the planning process.
2. A board and staff that are not embroiled in extreme, destructive conflict.
3. A board and staff who understand the purpose of planning and what it can and cannot accomplish, as well as consensus about expectations.
4. A commitment of resources to adequately assess current programs and the ability to meet current and future customer needs.
5. A willingness to question the status quo and to look at new approaches to performing and evaluating the business of the organization.

Question three asks, “Which basic elements should be included in the Association’s approach towards strategic planning?”

Research has identified there are three critical tasks that an organization must perform to begin creating the ideal future: 1) develop a vision statement identifying the shared hopes, dreams, and images of the future; 2) draft a mission statement answering why the organization exists, what business it’s in, whom it serves, and how it operates; and 3) articulate the core values that guide the organization’s day-to-day behavior and creates the organizational culture (Haines, 1995).

“Vision has a clear role in any planning” (NFA, 1997, p. 4-12). It presents an image of what success will look like by asking the Dane County Fire Chiefs Association “Where do they want to be?” and “What is the best they can be?” (Appendix C). Creating such a vision helps direct the change effort required in transforming the organization (Kotter, 1995).

A mission statement gives an organization a clear understanding of what it is and what it does; “it’s a statement of the reasons for the organization’s existence” (NFA, 1997, p. 4-13). The mission statement is developed to prevent confusion on the part of the planning committee concerning the direction the planning process should take.

“A value is an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct is preferable” (NFA, 1997, p. 4-13). Sometimes called beliefs and philosophies, values form a collective organization wide belief system (Haines, 1995).

When the DCFCA has committed itself to why it exists and what it does, it must then take a clear-eye look at its current situation and surrounding environment. It can initiate this process by asking itself where is it in relationship with community, elected officials, municipal administration, and other public safety organizations.

Question four asks, “What is the memberships’ feedback towards such elements of strategic planning?”

Research has identified the best way an organization can change is to involve personnel in the change process (Bruegman, 1994). “Stakeholders help to create the future, rather than be overwhelmed by and resistant to change” (Haines, 1995, p. 12). It is a good idea to get the membership to participate in the process and involve the people who will help with implementation as the organization plans.

It was decided by the strategic planning steering committee to employ a questionnaire. The questionnaire was formatted into ten questions addressing the basic elements of strategic planning. The following paragraphs provide how the questions related to the basic elements, in addition, to how membership perceived the organization in relation to the basic elements (Appendix E):

Questions 1, 3, 4, and 5 related to defining the organizational mission by asking membership “What are we and what do we do? What is our fundamental direction? For whom do we perform? How do we intend to perform our functions?” The majority of feedback indicated that the association felt it was a group of professional people, comprised from many departments, acting as a guidance organization within Dane County with no real legal authority. Feedback indicated that the fundamental direction should be focused on change, innovation, and better integration. The membership had a clear picture of the external customer and the services provided, but was unclear about who the internal customers were and what services should be provided. In providing services, feedback indicated a need for a strong mission and common entity.

Question 2 focused on developing the organization's vision by asking membership "What do we seek to do and become?" Feedback here suggested the need to pursue integration, to find common entity, and transform into a metropolitan response system.

Questions 6 and 7 asked how the membership felt about the organization by asking "What do we like about being a member of this organization? If we could change anything about this organization, what would it be?" The majority responses indicated a strong need for socializing, networking and sharing of information for the betterment of the fire service. Creating vision, uniformity within the county-wide system, more organization, and producing more results were areas that indicated a need for change.

Questions 8, 9, and 10 dealt with Environmental Scanning and SWOT Analysis by asking membership "What do you feel are the strengths and weaknesses of the association? What are the five priorities for the association? What holds back the association?" The major strengths within the organization were identified as the experience and education of members, resources, diversity, and public opinion. The major weaknesses identified were lack of direction and clear goals, communications, inability to take advantage of diversity, and no clear mission. The major priorities for the organization were identified as defining vision, mission, and core services; establish a goal program; create unity; and provide resource sharing. Finally, feedback on what holds the organization back was identified as lack of vision and mission, no defined goals, unclear strategy, and resource restraints.

## **DISCUSSION**

What does the Dane County Fire Chiefs Association (DCFCA) seeks to become? The answer to this question provides a means for communicating the organization's current mission with its future vision (Wallace, 1998). Culture builds a shared vision and is an intrinsic part of a

deeper organizational character; shared vision, with a set of common norms and values, is an organization's psychology (Mintzberg and Quinn, 1996).

The major challenge for the DCFCA was to develop a strategic plan on how to go about getting different county departments focused towards a common direction and mission. One of its major goals was to bring together the Fire Chiefs of the various departments of Dane County for the purpose of effecting ways and means for the betterment of the fire service (Appendix A).

The problem with this was that there had not been a long-term planning process to make this happen. In addition, there was no sense of urgency for change. The DCFCA met every other month discussing information on a year-to-year basis, but did not provide an opportunity for the organization to develop a clear vision for managing change. The urgency for change must be embodied in the message of vision and mission; and in order for rejuvenation to take place, all members of the organization must share an understanding of the problem and that action must be taken (Mintzberg and Quinn, 1996).

The most important thing about strategic planning is the development of strategic thought and action. This view is further substantiated as one of the basic elements in strategic planning by John Bryson in his book: *Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations*. Here, Bryson outlines the following steps as the major key elements of the process:

1. Clarify organizational mission and values.
2. Assess the organization's external and internal environments to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.
3. Identify the strategic issues facing the organization.
4. Formulate strategies to manage these issues.
5. Review and adopt the strategic plan or plans.

6. Establish an effective organizational vision.

Manage strategy is to manage change -- real transformation begins with management's recognition that new paths must be found (Mintzberg and Quinn, 1996). "Recent developments in technology, the competitive environment, and the regulatory statutes require a reassessment of the internal structures, support systems, and corporate values of most organizations" (Lindo, 1996, p. 3). Like other transforming organizations, the Dane County Fire Chiefs Association (DCFCA) must refocus from its past successes and develop entirely new skills and attitudes.

This new strategy must create a proactive futuring approach towards managing change (Wallace, 1998). The approach requires the achievement of fit between the external situation (opportunities and threats) and internal capability (strengths and weaknesses), and evolves as internal decisions and external events flow together to create a new, shared consensus for action (Mintzberg and Quinn, 1996).

"A significant effect of any strategic planning process is the learning that takes place as you move forward" (Cade, 2003). Since strategic planning is most effectively facilitated as "an iterative, participative design process; it enhances the adequacy, increases the accuracy, and generates the commitment of organizational stakeholders to adapt to or transform the environment, as needed or possible" (Lindsay and Petrick, 1997, p. 24).

The most effective way to change behavior is to put people into a new environment, which imposes new roles, responsibilities, and relationships on them (Beckham, 1996). While the values determine the norms or standards of acceptable behavior concerning how to approach work (Haines, 1995). This creates a situation that forces new attitudes and behaviors on people (Beckham, 1996). Thus, changing the formal structure (anatomy) forces changes in the



interpersonal relationships (physiology), which in turns reshapes individual attitudes (psychology) (Mintzberg and Quinn, 1996).

“The goal is a flywheel effect, where enough key players get involved and enrolled that it creates a momentum to carry the process forward” (Goss, Pascale, and Athos, 1993, p. 105).

“When a broad variety of members have input in guiding your organization, more people will feel they have a stake in the department’s goals and can help encourage buy-in from the rest of the organization” (Cade, 2003, p. 56).

The planning committee learns to function as an effective team in support of the strategic direction. “When firefighters commit their time and energy, they want to know the end result” (Cade, 2003, p. 54). This modeling of cross-functional teamwork is essential to successful implementation of teams, departments, and organizations of any size (Haines, 1995). “Team leadership involves the right balance of direction, mentoring, and facilitation” (Bryson, 1995, p. 220).

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The recommendations, based on this study, were to identify the benefits and basic elements associated with strategic planning and then analyze whether or not the Dane County Fire Chiefs Association (DCFCA) could employ them into the organization. This could be accomplished by having the planning committee direct the initiative by a) preparing the organization for planning b) formulating the basic elements associated with such a plan c) sharing feedback from the questionnaire with membership.

A key to the development of an organizational ideology is a leadership with a genuine belief in mission and an honest dedication to the people who must carry it out (Bryson, 1995). The major benefit identified through research that the DCFCA was lacking was the need to

develop common purpose and a sense of direction. This lack of strategic direction limited the organization from employing its diversity and reaching its true potential.

Another important point that the research identified was the importance of preparing to plan strategically. All too often it was the failure to properly plan that caused many worthwhile projects to fail or not reach full potential. If the DCFCA made the decision to pursue strategic planning, it needed to invest the time and energy to educate its members on the process. The strategic planning committee recommended that at least 30 minutes of each meeting be allocated to discuss the strategic planning process. This was vital in order to prepare the organization for the type of pro-futuring that strategic planning required.

In addition, research identified that the DCFCA needed to perform three critical tasks required in identifying the basic elements of strategic planning: 1) develop a vision statement identifying the shared hopes, dreams, and images of the future; 2) draft a mission statement answering why the organization exists, what business it's in, whom it serves, and how it operates; and 3) articulate the core values that guide the organization's day-to-day behavior and creates the organizational culture.

The research pointed out a strong need for organizations to develop a vision for the future based upon their organizational mission, values, and core services. Since results from the research clearly identified the need for the DCFCA to develop a clear vision and direction, it was recommended that the association develop a process in creating a vision and developing the strategies required to carry it out. As research again pointed out, in order for this to happen, leadership from the top would be required to direct the initiative.

Because the Dane County Fire Chiefs Association (DCFCA) was comprised of many different departments throughout the county, its culture was made-up of many different entities.

By not having a common entity, strategic planning was a difficult process. Therefore the DCFCA needed to explore a way to create a common entity that fit the organization but at the same time allowed autonomy for the different departments. Since the By-laws were written in 1977, it was recommended that they be revised. During the revision process, each department would be tasked to provide a mission statement on how they would best fit the needs of the organization. These statements would then provide a reason for the association's existence and provide the much needed direction the planning process would pursue.

Another recommendation was the need to establish a goal program. Being a non-profit association comprised of 30 full-time, part-time, and volunteer departments created a wide spectrum of provided services. The Dane County Fire Chiefs Association (DCFCA) did not clearly defined what it wanted to accomplish. It approved some committee work that accomplished short-range projects, but did little in developing goals dealing with some of the more longer range issues. By focusing as a common entity with a common vision, goal development and standardization of services would evolve.

When the DCFCA commits itself to why it exists and what it does, it is then ready to take a clear-eye look at its current situation and surrounding environment. It can initiate this process by asking itself where is it in relationship with community, elected officials, municipal administration, and other public safety organizations. This analysis must explore both the external environment (outside the organization) to identify opportunities and threats, and the internal environment (inside the organization) to identify its strengths and weaknesses. Once the gap between the ideal future and the DCFCA's capacity to attain that future is identified, an operational plan can be written to include action plans for each strategic issue.

Finally, the research clearly identified the importance of getting those affected by change involved in the change process. Initially, the questionnaire was distributed to 100% of the DCFCA membership (30 departments). However, only 17 departments responded back, representing a slight majority (56.7%) of the targeted population. In addition, there were no attempts made to contact any non-respondents. Therefore, it was strongly recommended to reiterate to membership the importance of completing the questionnaire, followed by redistributing the questionnaires to those departments that did not initially respond back. The main goal was to get a participation rate of 80% or more, thus allowing more feedback on where the organization was in terms of strategic planning.

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