EMPLOYEE RETENION OF PUBLIC SAFETY DISPATCHERS

Employee Retention in the Joplin, Missouri Public Safety Communication Center

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CERTIFICATION STATEMENT

I hereby certify that this paper constitutes my own product, that where language of others

is set forth, quotation marks so indicate, and that appropriate credit is given where I have

used the language, ideas, expressions, or writings of another.

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Abstract

The Joplin Communication Center experiences high attrition, which negatively impacts service delivery. This study's purpose was to identify why dispatchers are leaving and to propose retention initiatives. Historical research was utilized to answer research questions: Why have dispatchers left the Joplin communication center and other centers? Why have employees left other occupations? What retention initiatives are utilized in communication centers and other occupations? Procedures included questionnaires to current and former dispatchers and communication center directors. An interview was conducted with a healthcare industry key official. Literature review conducted. Results indicate attrition is linked to compensation, work-hours, staffing, and improper selection/hiring of employees. Recommendations: Maintain staffing levels, implement Team Management, update recruitment/screening process, address compensation issues, and professional development program.

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Introduction

The City of Joplin Public Safety Communication Center is committed to providing quality 911 communication services to the community. At the core of these services are highly trained professional dispatchers who carry out a multitude of critical tasks. With ever increasing call volumes and responsibilities it is essential to maintain adequate numbers of trained dispatchers on duty 24 hours each day.

The problem that has persisted for several years is that high rates of employee turnover have made it increasingly difficult to adequately staff the communication center with properly training personnel. The attrition problem and associated understaffing has created a chain reaction negative effect on workload, work hours, job stress, employee morale and job satisfaction.

The purpose of this research project is to identify why public safety communication dispatchers are leaving the organization and identify initiatives to facilitate retention.

Historical research will be conducted to answer the following research questions:

1. Why have City of Joplin Communication Dispatchers left the organization?

2. In general, why do Communication Dispatchers leave other communication centers?

3. Why do employees leave their jobs in other occupations?

4. What retention initiatives are in place in other communication centers?

5. What retention initiatives are in place in other occupations?

Background And Significance

The Joplin Emergency Communication Center (JECC) is operated by the City of Joplin, Missouri. It is administered by a Manager who reports to a Communications Board comprised of the Police Chief, Fire Chief, and Public Works Director. This Center is a combined dispatch center that provides emergency and non-emergency communication services for City of Joplin Police, Fire, Emergency Medical Services, Emergency Management, Public Works, Public Health and Animal Control departments. Annual call volume for 2003 was approximately 60,000 police calls, 5000 Fire/EMS Emergency calls, 1,200 EMS non-emergency calls and 2000 other service requests.

The department is allocated eighteen (18) full-time staff, which includes One (1) Manager, three (3) Lead Public Safety Communication Dispatchers/Supervisors, twelve (12) Dispatchers and one (1) Radio Technician. The center operates with three staffed consoles, and normally works three 8-hour shifts in a 24-hour seven-day-a-week operation.

In a five-year period between September 1, 1999 and September 1, 2004 the JECC has lost 18 employees. Eleven of these employees left their positions within a 12-month period between June 2003 and June 2004. This large turnover rate put a great deal of stress on the communication center and the remaining communication operators.

During this progressive decline in personnel, work hours were increased from 40 hour per week to 45 and then to 48 hour per week. The work shifts went from 8 hours to 9 and then to 12. Workload and responsibility also increased as personnel decreased. As

the number of personnel decreased the rate of attrition increased and the problem continued to worsen to one point were there were only 8 communication operators. In addition, a number of those lost were senior supervisory and training personnel. This made it difficult to train and supervise new personnel as they were hired.

The JECC has a long-term history of personnel turnover of both the nominal and high personnel number variety, similar to that encountered in 2003-2004. The impact of high rates of personnel turnover on the JECC, the departments and citizens it serves has been significant.

During periods of high personnel turnover and reduced dispatcher numbers, there is an increase in work hours and workload. Additionally, vacation and holiday time is often restricted. These factors appear to decrease morale and job satisfaction among personnel. At the same time, there is a decrease in experienced staff, a lack of experienced trainers and supervisors. These factors appear to foster an increase in operational errors, decreased operational performance and continuity.

Other significant impacts of high personnel attrition include the cost of employee recruitment, testing, training and certifying. With limited budget resources the continual drain from employee attrition is extremely detrimental to the organization and utilizes funds that could be better allocated within the communication center.

The focus of this applied research project is to identify why the turnover of public safety communication dispatchers in the Joplin Communication Center is so high and to develop strategies for the future to reduce this serious problem. A number of core topics from the Executive Fire Officer Program course, Executive Development, will be utilized in this process. First, extensive research (Executive Development) Chapter 4: *Research*

National Fire Academy [NFA] 2004, pp 4-2 to 4-23 will be conducted to determine

primary causes of the attrition in the Joplin Center and communication centers in other

areas. A major factor to be examined and likely to be a factor in any future improvements

is organizational culture; this was the topic in Chapter 7 of the (Executive Development

Course) [NFA], 2004, pp 7-3 to 7-35. In examining possible solutions to the employee

turnover issue, I will be considering various methods of change management, which were

addressed in Chapter 3 of the (Executive Development Course) [NFA] 2004, 3-3 to 3-32.

This research project also is relates to the operational objectives of the United

States Fire Administration (United States Fire Administration) [USFA], 2003.

Responding in a timely manner to emerging issues in the fire service is one of those

objectives and is one of the objectives of this research project. Retention of Emergency

Communications Operators is not necessarily a new problem, but it is a widespread and

persistent one. The results of this research will provide direction for development of an

employee retention initiative in the Joplin Emergency Communication Center and will

provide ideas for other dispatch centers that are struggling with similar retention

problems.

<div align="center">Literature Review</div>

The literature review for this research project will examine employee retention

not only in public safety communication centers, but also in other high turnover

occupations. The review will focus on issues that have been identified as causal for

employee attrition and programs/methods that have been utilized to combat the problem.

The majority of articles and data reviewed for this project were obtained from

professional journals and publications. In addition, U.S. Government Internet sites

offered current statistical information. The Internet was used extensively in this research project and material was also obtained from the Joplin Public Library.

I also interviewed a key official from the National Association of Geriatric Nursing Assistants (NAGNA), which represents certified nursing assistants in an industry known for employee retention issues.

Statistics

In reviewing the issue of employee retention in public safety communication centers, it is important to compare this setting to other industries. In reviewing reports from the *Bureau of Labor Statistics* [BLS], (2004) total annual turnover rates for non-farm occupations in the year 2003 were at a rate of 36.3%. When viewing only private sector employees for the same years the rate was 43.5% while among public sector employees it was documented at 14.4%. Looking at the specific areas of Education and Health services an annual turnover rate of 27% was reported for 2003 while the Leisure and Hospitality industry showed a 70.3% rate.

In an interview with a senior official of NAGNA, (J.Wellman, personnel communication, October 10, 2004), Mr. Wellman indicated that the nursing assistant industry and particularly those working in nursing homes and other geriatric care settings have historically experienced high employee turnover. According to Mr. Wellman, annual turnover rates for nursing assistances run around 146% with about 80% attrition in the first 120 days of employment.

Despite offering starting salaries that were often 2 to 3 times minimum wage, while having no college or experience requirement, the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) has experienced 50% attrition rates among their dispatchers (Parks, 2004).

A survey conducted by the American Correctional Association presented a 16.1% annual turnover rate for the year 2000, up from 12.6% in 1995 (Lommel, 2004).

Examining employee tenure (*BLS*, 2004) indicates for 2002, median years of tenure with employer overall at 3.7 years. Looking at specific segments of the labor force, private sector employees overall averaged 3.3 years, while public sector employees averaged 6.7 years. The same report showed tenure in health services excluding hospitals at 3.1 years while leisure and hospitality was seeing 2.3 years.

The Impact of Employee Turnover

The literature details a number of issues that impact the employer as a result of employee turnover. The financial impact is often the most recognized, including cost for recruitment, advertising, interviews, staff time, travel and other expenses, testing and any number of additional ancillary expenses. The average cost to hire a nurse is $2,651 (*Modern Healthcare*, 2004), 11% higher than the reported average cost of other allied health professionals. A survey to 206 medium to large U.S. companies reported that 45% of respondents indicated a replacement cost of more than $10,000 per employee while 20% reported a cost exceeding $30,000 per employee (Sunoo, Brend Paik, 1998). Some companies are seeing costs reach 150% of the employee's annual compensation figure for general employees and up to 250% for managerial and sales professionals (Bliss, 2001). These costs can be broken down into 3 primary categories: recruitment costs, training cost, lost productivity costs.

In addition, to the financial impact of turnover, a number of other important factors were uncovered in a study by the American Correctional Association (ACA) in 2003 (Lommel, 2004). This study reported increased stress and burnout among remaining

staff, inadequate and /or inexperienced staff and low morale to be results of high

employee attrition.

Why do People Leave their Jobs?

There is always a certain amount of employee turnover due to retirements,

promotions and career development, however some industries and specific occupations

experience attrition rates far greater than others.

One business expert/author identified 10 primary reasons employees resign (McCann,

2004).

1. Basic financial needs not met.

2. Lack of competitive salary

3. Poor Benefits

4. Poor communication

5. Negative work environment

6. Lack of recognition

7. Unfair treatment

8. Lack of challenge in job

9. Lack of job security

10. Life conflicts

According to a survey of 150 executives with the U.S.'s top 1,000 companies,

lack of advancement opportunities tops the list of reasons that employees are leaving

their jobs (*HRFOCUS*, July 2004). This study reported 39 % of respondents felt

employees were most likely to leave because of lack of advancement opportunity, with

unhappiness with management at 23%, lack of recognition at 17%, inadequate salary and benefits at 11%, boredom at 6%, life style change at 2% and other listed at (2%).

A survey conducted on 4,000 Information Technology professionals (D'Antoni, 2004) reported that nearly 65% of respondents that were seeking new jobs were doing so for more pay. Pursuit of friendlier management/corporate culture was reported by 40% of those surveyed. The same survey asked "What would influence you to accept a lesser position or title?" More job satisfaction was listed by 58% of respondents as such an enticement.

A study by the Society of Incentives and Travel Executives Foundation (SITE) examined retention efforts in the Hospitality Industry (Rauch, 2004). This study reported that older workers tend to be more persistent and more likely to stay during difficult times, and women have a higher turnover rate than men even though they are more likely to say they consider their work important. The study also presents a link between turnover rates and positive work environment, with a 20% reduced turnover rate in employees that report high levels of value and support at work.

A study conducted by the American Correctional Association in 2000 (Lommel, 2004) reported that the top reasons cited by correctional officers for high attrition were, demanding hours/shift work, inadequate pay, stressful work environment and poor recruit selection.

The medical field has been struggling with nursing shortages for several years and employers have been examining the issues that cause nurses to change jobs (Ashish, 2003). Compensation has been identified as the primary reason for nurse mobility, with demand high nurses can shop for the best paying organization. Working conditions and

poor scheduling are two additional factors that cause many nurses to leave their positions.

Additional issues effecting nurse attrition according to Ashish, include disrespect by

other health professionals, poor benefit packages, health and safety, and spouse mobility.

Even greater problems of attrition are reported in the geriatric care arena among

certified nursing assistants (J.Wellman, personnel communication, October 10, 2004).

The list of causes is topped by low wages; "21% of CNA's qualify for public assistance"

according to Wellman. Benefits are nearly non-existent, and health insurance a rarity.

The work is difficult, injury rates are very high and there is very little promotional

opportunity in the field. Another major problem is lack of recognition for the important

work that they do, their status has often been considered at the bottom of the health care

ladder.

Literature addressing public safety dispatchers, pointed to a number of reasons for

attrition. Frances Holt (1999) brought up the issue of dispatchers being civilian while

most of those they dispatch are uniformed and sworn police officers, fire personnel or

paramedics. He went on to identify that a lack of career pathways with few command

layers in communications results in limited opportunity for advancement. This also

results in the dispatcher reaching the maximum salary early in their career which negates

any longevity incentive. Additionally, Holt reported low visibility/lack of recognition of

the profession and management by non-dispatchers as major causes of high turnover in

communication centers.

The International Association of Public Safety Communication Officials (APCO)

researched and published findings "Project (40) Retains" with a goal to develop a

standard for operational staffing and management of personnel in public safety

communication centers (*APCO*, 2003). Within that report, they identified five Best Practices areas designed to help organizations to hire and retain dispatchers; job/position classification, hiring process, compensation/retirement, staffing/recognition and working conditions. APCO points strongly at the key to solving the high turnover problem in public safety communications centers being successfully addressing the above best practices.

Employee Retention Programs/Efforts

There seems to be an awareness in most management arenas that employee turnover is costly and counterproductive. The literature review uncovered a variety of efforts being attempted to address the issue. Keeping employees challenged and empowered in an organization may do more to keep an employee than higher salaries (McCuan, 2004). Many employers make a practice of promoting current employees to higher-level positions that become available, a method referred to as "internal mobility" and a way to keep employees challenged and productive. An addition benefit of this is that is takes much less time to get the employee trained and fully productive in the new position. In addition, McCuan reported that some CEO's faced with tight budgets have found success by cutting back on salary increases but developing creative benefit packages. These benefits would be tailored to the needs of the employee. Employee surveys were encouraged as a method of staying in touch with the needs and wants of the employee and keeping them happy and employed in your organization.

Strategies for retention of nurses were outlined by Ashish (2003). Several areas of focus were suggested, including assuring comparable salaries and developing flexible schedules with input from the nurses. Additionally, it was recommended that internal

advancement be promoted, recognition programs developed and employee focus groups

be used to provide ideas for benefit enhancement.

The long term healthcare industry has been working on a number of retention

initiatives for certified nursing assistants (J.Wellman, personnel communication, October

10, 2004). A major initiative, the "Eden Alternative," is a program that has been under

way in the industry for the past four years. It is designed to reshape the way care is given

and in turn should have a major positive improvement on the workplace for nursing

assistants and other caregivers. The major focus of the program is to re-engineer the

physical structure of the facilities to more resemble a home (less institutional), to involve

staff more in management and patient care planning, and to develop care teams.

Additionally, efforts were taken to focus on better practices for hiring and training of new

personnel. Teams, committees and preceptors were part of the plan for improved training.

Wellman also indicated that the industry was working on employee professional

development, career ladders and lateral movement to improve retention of employees.

Finally, he indicated that they were various efforts across the country addressing the

compensation and benefits issues in the industry. One of the most interesting was the

concept of "direct wage pass throughs" a process where the State agrees to increase

Medicare rates to the facilities under agreement that the overage goes toward wages.

The ACA study on retention of correctional officers in 2003, cited a number of

recommendations (Lommel, 2004). It was recommended they re-write job descriptions to

accurately describe responsibilities and expectations of employees and then hire

candidates that would most likely succeed. They also suggested efforts to better

recognize employees on the job and in the community. In addition, they recommended

that organizations find creative ways to invest in their employees, training, educational incentives, cross-training, exchange/networking programs with other institutions, and mentoring programs.

A study conducted with over 2,000 respondents from diverse industries listed ten top reasons for wanting to stay with a company. (Kaye, Jordan-Evans, 2000).

1. career growth, learning and development

2. exciting work and challenge

3. meaningful work, making a difference

4. great people

5. being part of a team

6. good boss

7. recognition

8. autonomy

9. flexible

10. fair pay and benefits

Ninety percent of respondents cited at least one of the first three items as primary; it should be noted that pay and benefits were number 10.

Recognition has been mentioned throughout the literature as an important component of an organization's employee retention program. When using recognition as a strategy, you must clarify how recognition benefits the organization (Klubnik, 1995). It is the responsibility of the leaders to explain/demonstrate the relationship between individual performance, recognition, increased productivity/performance and value to the organization.

The "Retains" project (APCO, 2003) places a great deal of emphasis on the importance of adequate staffing on the retention of employees. When an adequate number of qualified personnel are not maintained in a communication center, employee issues often arise, such as increased stress, errors, decreased job satisfaction, burn-out and ultimately turnover. They call for development of methodologies to determine adequate staffing levels for call takers and dispatchers within the public safety communication center.

An ongoing project on dispatcher retention initiated by the LAPD in 1997 addresses public education regarding dispatchers, enhancements of dispatcher jobs, and a focus on recruitment and training (Parks, 2004). The Communication Division established a Community Relations Unit, which is charged with educating the public on the mission and capabilities of the Los Angeles 911 Communications System. Utilizing public forums, job fairs and various media to educate the public, they also use these opportunities to recruit potential dispatchers, activity previously reserved for police and fire recruits.

Parks (2004) also reports on the development and use of Peace Officer's Standards and Training (POST) testing, established for entry-level selection and training of public safety dispatchers. The screening focuses on nine cognitive abilities within four major areas, Verbal, Perceptual, Reasoning and Memory. The training of dispatchers has been redesigned with information gained from previous unsuccessful candidates in mind, classroom time has been extended and much time is spent on dealing with the stressors of the job. One year and five classes of dispatchers later, a 58% decrease in candidate

attrition has been achieved. Long-term study will be required to establish the effect on long-term employee retention.

Holt (1999) makes a number of suggestions that he says will reduce dispatcher attrition and improve service. First, to address the issue of dispatchers being civilian while working around all sworn personnel, he says bring them together operationally and socially. This will help suppress wall building and foster camaraderie and team building. To target the problem of limited career pathways, Holt suggests you engage your dispatchers in related activities, especially training. Hire managers that are experienced in the business of dispatching and hire from within when possible. And finally, Holt suggests that you recognize and publicize the accomplishments of the communication center.

Literature Review Summary.

Employee retention is an issue that troubles many industries and professions in this country. The literature review for this study reaffirmed that the problems associated with employee retention in Public Safety Communication Centers is not unlike those issues in other industries. Likewise the strategies and processes to address these issues could be very similar to those being used in other applications. The literature review provided a vast amount of information, ideas and options that can be measured against the local data gathered in this study and referenced when a strategic initiative is constructed later to address the local retention issues.

Procedures

Survey Instruments

A primary tool used to gather data to answer research questions 1 and 2 was questionnaires. This process was begun in early September, 2004 and completed over a four-week period. Two questionnaires were developed for research question 1. One for former employees (Appendix A) and one for current employees (Appendix B). Both surveys were distributed with a cover letter explaining the study (Appendix C). The questionnaires for former employees were sent via U.S. Postal Service to the last known address obtained through the City personnel office to all personnel that left employment with the Joplin Communication Center in the past five years, (15 people). Each of these requests contained a self addressed stamped envelope for return. The questionnaires for current employees were sent to all 15 personnel via electronic mail to their work address and returned in electronic format. Results of former and current employee questionnaires are available in (Appendices D and E respectively).

A questionnaire used for research question 2 (Appendix F) was distributed to 200 communication directors in 10 Midwest states with a cover letter (Appendix G). The names of recipients were randomly selected from those with electronic mail addresses listed in the APCO directory. Responses were returned electronically (30 completed), results are available (Appendix H).

Literature Review

The research for this study began with literature review in August of 2004 and continued through October 2004. The Internet was used extensively to access much of the data used in this study. Direct access to EBSCO host and Electronic Book sites from the

researcher residence was used extensively. Internet sites of government agencies and associations were also used. Research was also conducted at the Joplin Public Library using onsite and electronic material.

Interview

To gather information for research questions 3 and 4, a personal interview was conducted on October 10, 2004. The interview was conducted with Mr. Jeff Wellman, Director of Professional Services for NAGNA, at their headquarters at 2709 W. 13th St. Joplin, Missouri. The purpose of the interview was to obtain information on employee retention issues for nursing assistants in the long-term health care industry. The interview followed an outline of questions (Appendix I) intended to establish the extent of the attrition problem, causes of the attrition and what is being done to combat it. The interview lasted about 90 minutes.

Assumptions

Questionnaires sent electronically to APCO members were addressed to Communication Center Directors; it is assumed that those that responded were in-fact directors. It is also assumed that information obtained from published material researched for this study is authoritative and unbiased. It is further assumed that information derived from respondents to the Communications Center Directors Questionnaire is valuable in comparison purposes for this study. It is further assumed that employee retention tactics and programs in other industries are applicable to the public safety communications.

Limitations

The relatively small number of questionnaires returned from the Communication Directors is a limiting factor in this study. A factor to be considered in this, is that the questionnaire was distributed electronically and many of them were blocked from delivery by the receiving agency's security software. Another limitation was the ability to contact former employees; there is system for tracking employee once they leave employment. The limited number of formal employee retention programs in the Public Safety Communications industry identified in this research is another limitation.

Results

This study was intended to investigate employee retention issues within the Joplin, Missouri Public Safety Communications Center and utilize research information to develop recommendations for an employee retention program. The results of this research project were obtained through literature review, an interview with a subject expert, and questionnaires to local dispatchers and communication center directors around the country.

Questionnaires

The research questions are listed here with results and findings

Research Question 1. Why do City of Joplin Communication Dispatchers leave the organization?

In researching this question I examined two groups, current City of Joplin Public Safety Communication Dispatchers and former Communication Dispatchers. I distributed questionnaires (appendix B and C) to each group and analyzed the data.

Former employees were asked, "what was your primary reason for leaving employment as a Public Safety Communication Dispatcher in Joplin?"

Table 1.

Former Employees: Reasons for Leaving Jobs

Primary Reason for Leaving	Primary Answers	Secondary Answers
Insufficient Salary	0 Respondents	0 Respondents
Insufficient Retirement	0 Respondents	0 Respondents
Pursue Other Career Goals	1 Respondent – 14%	0 Respondents
Physical Working Conditions	0 Respondents	0 Respondents
High Stress Working Conditions	1 Respondents – 14%	2 Respondents
Work Hours/Shift Work	2 Respondents – 29%	0 Respondents
Other	3 Respondents – 43%	0 Respondents

Work hours/shift work was identified by 29% of former employees as the primary cause for them leaving their job. High stress working conditions and pursuit of career goals was listed by 14% respectively. The three 'other' responses were, retirement 14%, all of the above 14%, and poor administration 14%.

Current employees were asked, "what do you believe is the primary reason for personnel leaving employment as Public Safety Communication Dispatchers?"

Table 2.

Current Employees: Reasons for Leaving Jobs

Primary Reason for Leaving	Primary Answers	Secondary Answers
Insufficient Salary	5 Respondents – 38%	0 Respondents
Insufficient Retirement	0 respondents	1 Respondents
Pursue Other Career Goals	1 respondent – 8%	0 Respondents
Physical Working Conditions	0 respondents	0 Respondents

Current Employees:	Reasons for Leaving Jobs	
High Stress Working Conditions	4 Respondents – 31%	2 respondents
Work Hours/Shift Work	3 respondents – 23%	6 Respondents
Other	0 Respondents	0 Respondents

Insufficient salary was the top answer for current employee respondents at 38%, followed by high stress working conditions at 31%. Work hours/shift work was reported by 23% and career goals by 8%.

When asked to rate a number of key issues related to employee retention on a scale from 'excellent' to 'poor', 57% of former employees reported salary to be 'good', while 14% former employees reported it to be 'excellent', 'fair' and 'poor' respectively. Current employees reported salary 'good' 46%, fair 31% and poor 23%. Benefits were reported to be 'good' by 57% of former employees while 14% reported them to be 'excellent', 'fair' and 'poor' respectively. Benefits were reported 'fair' by 61%, 'good' by 23%, 'excellent' and 'poor' by 8% respectively by current employees. Retirement benefits were rated 'good' by 43% of former employee respondents while 29% stated they were poor. Retirement was rated poor by 54%, and good 38% of current employees. Physical working conditions and understanding of the job upon hire were both rated 'good' by 71% and 86% of former employee respondents. Physical working conditions were rated 'fair' by 54% of current employees, and understanding of the job prior to hire was rated good by 46%. Former employees identified work hours and employee involvement in the organization as being 'poor' by 43% and 57% respectively. Work hours and employee involvement were evaluated as poor by 38% and fair by 59% respectively by current employees. Finally training/support and peer relations were both

rated 'fair' by 43% of former employee respondents. Training/support and peer relations

were rated 'poor' by 31% and 'good' by 38% respectively of current employees.

When asked what one item, if improved, would have the greatest impact on

retention of dispatchers in the Joplin Communication Center;

Table 3.

Former Employees: Item for Greatest Impact On Retention

Issue	Number of Respondents
Salary	1 Respondents – 14%
Benefits	0 Respondents
Management	2 Respondents – 29%
Physical Work Environment	0 Respondents
Work Hours / Shifts	2 Respondents – 29%
Training	1 Respondents – 14%
Pre-Employment Screening	0 Respondents
Other	1 Respondents – 14%

Former employees reported an equal split of 29% for management and work hours/shifts.

Salary, training and 'all' were each reported by 14% of the former employee respondents.

Table 4.

Current Employees: Item for Greatest Impact On Retention

Issue	Number of Respondents
Salary	4 Respondents – 31%
Benefits	2 Respondents – 15%
Management	0 Respondents
Physical Work Environment	0 Respondents
Work Hours / Shifts	5 Respondents – 38%
Training	0 Respondents
Pre-Employment Screening	0 Respondents
Other	2 Respondents – 15%

Work hours and shifts reported as the top issue by 38% of current dispatchers while 31%

reported salary.

Current dispatchers were asked, "have you ever considered leaving your position as a Public safety dispatcher in Joplin?"

10 Respondents -77%	3 Respondents - 23%

If Yes, Why:
   a. Frustration with supervisors. (1)
   b. To reduce stress. (3)
   c. Obtain better salary. (2)
   d. Unable or willing to work 12 hour shifts.(2)
   e. Schedule not conducive to family life. (2)

Ten of the thirteen respondents reported they had contemplated leaving their position as a dispatcher.

Research Question 2. "In general, why do Public Safety Communication Operators/Dispatchers leave other Public Safety Communication Centers?"

To answer this question a questionnaire (Appendix A), was distributed to Public Safety Communication Center Directors in ten Midwest states. Selection was random from a list of members of APCO. In addition, literature review was conducted to examine findings of previous studies of the topic.

The questionnaire asked the directors what they believed was the primary reason for personnel leaving employment as public safety communication dispatchers in their agency. The top response, reported by 30% of respondents was insufficient salary, followed by work hours/shift work 27%. High stress working conditions and pursuit of career goals were both reported by 17% of respondents, while 3% reported physical working conditions, improper pre-employment screening and interpersonal conflicts respectively.

Table 5.

Communication Directors: Primary Reasons for Dispatcher Attrition

Primary Reason for Leaving	Primary Answers	Secondary Answers
Insufficient Salary	9 Respondents 30%	0 Respondents
Insufficient Retirement	0 Respondents	0 Respondents
Pursue Other Career Goals	5 Respondent 17%	0 Respondents
Physical Working Conditions	1 respondents 3%	0 Respondents
High Stress Working Conditions	5 Respondents 17%	2 Respondents
Work Hours/Shift Work	8 respondents 27%	2 Respondents
Other	2 Respondents 6%	0 Respondents

Comments: a. Two respondents listed multiple answers for this question. For

the table above the first answer listed was considered primary.

Additional answers are indicated in the third column.

b. Two respondents reported "other" issues:

1. Improper pre-employment screening.

2. Personal conflict between coworkers and supervisors.

Literature Review

The literature review uncovered a number of issues that have been blamed for

attrition of dispatchers. The issues of civilian vs. sworn personnel, lack of career

advancement and promotional pathways are issues that seem to be prevalent (Holt, 1999).

Additionally, low visibility/lack of recognition of the profession, management by non-

dispatchers were listed as major causes of high turnover in communication centers.

Organizations studying the problem have published findings (APCO, 2003) that indicate that unclear job/position descriptions and poor hiring processes can cause the wrong people to be hired. In addition, inadequate compensation and retirement packages, inadequate staffing, inadequate employee recognition and poor working conditions contribute to high employee turnover in public safety communication centers.

Research Question 3. **"**What causes employee turnover in other industries/occupations?"

The literature review found several industries and occupations that have high employee turnover and several primary causes were identified. A top five list of causes in the general work place contains the issues of: salary, benefits, organizational communication and work environment (McCann, 2004). Another study which focused on business executives showed the primary reason to seek new employment was lack of career advancement (HRFOCUS, July 2004). In the information technology field inadequate salary seems to be the number one motivator for job switching while dissatisfaction with job was second (D' Antoni, 2004). Nurses are most likely to change employers because of pay; working conditions, poor scheduling, recognition were also common causes of nurse attrition (Ashish, 2003).

A major problem has been identified in the long-term health care industry with attrition of nursing assistants (J. Wellman, personal communication, October 10, 2004). Mr. Wellman reported that there are seven primary causes of the high turnover of nursing assistants in the geriatric field; very low compensation and poor if any benefits, no career ladder or promotional opportunity, high injury rates, employee recognition and empowerment, no retirement plans and other industries competing for the workers.

Research Question 4. **"**What employee retention initiatives are in place in other Public Safety Communication Centers?"

The literature review for this study provided a number examples of employee retention efforts in the Public safety Communications area. Most notable was a program in LAPD (Parks, 1997), which placed a great deal of emphasis on recruitment and training of the dispatcher candidates. They also focused on public recognition of the dispatchers and their role in Public Safety by creating a Community Relations Unit within the division.

APCO has published "Retains," a Best Practices guideline for communication centers to address employee retention (APCO, 2003). This document identifies adequate staffing as a key to avoiding a number of the other issues that often are cited for employee attrition: stress, work overload, excess work hours, etc. The guideline also outlines other points to key issues and makes recommendations on recruitment and training, career development, and employee recognition.

Research Question 5. "What employee retention initiatives are in place in other occupations?"

The literature review produced a large amount of information on employee retention programs in other businesses and occupations. Addressing the issue of internal mobility (McCuan, 2004) many employers make a practice of promoting from within. This practice helps to satisfy employees' need to feel challenged, empowered and to improve wages.

In the medical field, nurses are being enticed to stay with competitive salary packages (Ashish, 2003) and creative benefit packages are often developed by employee

focus groups. In addition, internal career ladders are being developed and performance recognition programs are being developed.

Efforts to recruit and retain correctional officers have put emphasis on hiring the right people, training them properly and recognizing their needs as employees (Lommel, 2004). These efforts included revision of job descriptions to clarify expectations of employee and employer. Their program also took steps to provide better visibility of the profession and the recognition of the employees in the community. Other components of the ACA retention programs include creative ways to invest in the employee: training, educational incentives, cross-training, employee exchange/networking programs and mentoring programs.

Interviews

In the long-term healthcare industry organizations are looking globally at how to address major attrition issues with certified nursing assistants (Wellman, personal communication, October 10, 2003). The nursing home industry is actually looking at programs to change the whole "look and feel" of the long-term care facility to make it more home like and less institutional. They believe this along with operational changes; will help address many of the issues that have caused employee loss in the past.

Employee empowerment and involvement in patient care teams and planning help to challenge and provide for achievement needs (Wellman, personal communication, October 10, 2003). Providing for career development and internal advancement opportunities was cited as a major objective in retention programs in this industry. It was also mentioned that re-evaluating the recruitment and hiring process was also a component of retention efforts, because who you hire will impact your efforts to retain

them. Finally, another major issue was low salaries and inadequate benefits. Because this industry is largely funded by state and federal program, they are working on creative ways of getting the government to assist in improving the wage/benefit problem.

Discussion

This study reaffirmed information from previous writings that there are numerous causative issues related to employee attrition. However, as indicated in the literature, primary causes can be identified and corrective action programs can be developed to address them.

Examining research question number one, which asked why Public Safety Dispatchers were leaving Joplin, this study points to three primary issues and several contributing issues. Salary, high stress working conditions and the shift work scheduling were identified as the primary causative factors in attrition among Joplin Dispatchers. A number of other issues certainly contribute to the problem, including dissatisfaction with the retirement program, the physical working conditions and the general benefit package.

It should be noted that although salary was the number one answer given by current employees for attrition it was not listed first by any of the former employee respondents, where work hours/shifts was number one. The reduction of work hours and changes in scheduling were reported as major needs by current employees, however, it should be noted that this center had a significant staffing shortage prior to and during this study which had resulted in 12-hour shifts and significant overtime.

Although the reasons given for leaving vary, the key implication that should be clear to readers comes from the results of the question to current dispatchers: "have you

ever considered leaving your position as a Public Safety Dispatcher with the City of

Joplin?" With 77% of respondents answering yes, it should be clear that the issue of

employee retention must taken very seriously and addressed with a comprehensive

program.

The local results were very similar to those found in the other communication

centers around the country, addressing research question two. Salary, work hours and

stressful working conditions were a common theme as indicated in the questionnaires.

Other areas of importance were recruitment/screening to hire the appropriate personnel

and training.

The implications in the above findings are that issues related to attrition in the

Joplin Communication Center are parallel to those in other communication centers. This

also means that retention programs and initiatives effective in other organizations could

be examined for use in Joplin.

In researching the third question, I looked into why employees leave their jobs in

other occupations. The literature pointed to a list of ten top issues that tend to cause

personnel to leave their employers (HRFOCUS, July 2004). Seeking improved salaries

and more job satisfaction are often on the top of the list of attrition reasons as noted in the

information technology industry (D'Antoni, 2004). The issues of demanding work hours,

employee recognition and upward mobility were identified in both the correctional

industry (Lommel, 2004) and nursing (Ashish, 2003). These issues were further

reflected in the geriatric care field (J.Wellman, personal communication, October 10,

2004) where salary/benefits and employee career structuring are key issues.

Comparing the issues of employee retention in other work sectors to the local issues we find much similarity. Salary, benefits, working conditions, career advancement opportunities and recognition are issues that cross over the occupational boundaries. It would be implied then, that solutions in other industries could also cross over and be helpful in the Public Safety Communication business.

In researching questions number four and five, which asked what retention initiatives/programs are in place in other communication centers and in other occupations/industries, I found a number of concepts that could have application in addressing our local retention issues. To address the needs of the employees for challenge and advancement opportunities (McCuan, 2004) many organizations develop internal career ladders that encourage promotion from within and empowers employee career growth. Attention to competitive salaries, benefits and career advancement are key programs being implemented in the nursing industry to retain employees (Ashish, 2003).

A total re-structuring of the long-term care facility setting and operational practices are key base components of retention efforts of certified nursing assistants (J, Wellman, personal communication, October 10, 2004). Employee retention efforts in the LAPD communication center place great focus on proper recruitment and training of candidates (Parks, 2004). These issues are repeated in program recommendations from APCO 'Retains' (APCO, 2003), which also identifies appropriate staffing levels as a key to addressing many retention issues. The issue of adequate staffing can be linked directly back to the study results which placed that as a priority among dispatchers for improvement.

Recommendations

The Joplin Public Safety Communication Center must take steps to reduce the high attrition levels of public safety dispatchers that has been experienced in the past. To accomplish this, they should follow a systematic approach to addressing the key and contributing issues as identified in this study. As determined by the study, the following recommendations are presented:

1. Implement a team based management style, encouraging employee involvement throughout the organization. Use committees to address major issues and initiatives; they should consist of a cross-section of personnel in the organization and report to the Communications and Emergency Preparedness Board. These steps will precipitate employee empowerment, provide challenge and fulfillment opportunities while fully utilizing the resources of the organization.

2. Monitor communication center work load and related staffing needs using nationally recognized benchmarks. This initiative should also be tasked with developing schedules that are employee friendly. Annual reports and long term projection reports should be produced to assist management is budgeting appropriate personnel and facilities. Explore creative methods to buffer employee turnover. These steps will improve staffing and work hour/shift issues identified in the study.

3. Examine and improve the recruitment and screening process for dispatchers. Identify methods to better educate candidates about the challenges, responsibility and rigors of the position of dispatcher. Utilize screening methods to select

candidates most likely to secede in the position. These steps will help address the issues of short-term attrition identified in the study.

4. Work with local educational institutions to create a local dispatcher training/certification program. This would help create a pool of trained candidates for openings. This step should decrease attrition by increasing pre-hire knowledge and skills of candidates.

5. Conduct a compensation analysis and work with city management to improve salaries and benefits. This recommendation is intended to address the highly reported issue in the study of inadequate salaries, benefits and retirement packages.

6. Develop a public education and community relations program to provide recognition to the dispatchers and the communication center. This recommendation is intended to improve public awareness of the role and importance of dispatchers in the public safety system.

7. Institute a professional development program. This recommendation will address the needs identified in the study related to employee development, from initial training through ongoing career development.

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Appendix A

Public Safety Communication Dispatcher
Employee Retention Questionnaire
Former Employee   ☐

Length of Employment: 1 to 6 months   ☐
                      6 months to 1 year ☐

                      1 year to 3 years   ☐
                      3 years to 5 years   ☐
                      5 years to 10 years ☐
                      10 year or more   ☐

1. What was your primary reason for leaving employment as a Public Safety
    Communication Dispatcher?
    a. ☐ Insufficient Salary
    b. ☐ Insufficient Retirement
    c. ☐ Pursue Other Career Goals
    d. ☐ Poor Physical Working Conditions
    e. ☐ High Stress Working Conditions
    f. ☐ Work Hours/Shift Work
    g. ☐ Other_____
    Comments_____
    _____
    _____

2.   Please rate the following issues as they relate to your job satisfaction and
     performance in the Public Safety Communication Dispatcher position.

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
a. Salary	☐	☐	☐	☐
b. Benefits	☐	☐	☐	☐
c. Retirement Plan	☐	☐	☐	☐
d. Physical Working Conditions	☐	☐	☐	☐
e. Understanding of Job Prior to Hire	☐	☐	☐	☐

f. Work Hours/Shift Work ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

g. Training and Support ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

h. Employee Involvement ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
   in the Organization
  (Team Management)

i. Peer Relations ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

3.   Have you been employed as a Public Safety Communication Dispatcher since leaving your position in Joplin?   Yes ☐   No ☐

4. What one item if improved, would have the greatest impact on working conditions as Public Safety   Communication Dispatcher with the City of Joplin?
    a. ☐ Physical Work Environment
    b. ☐ Team Management Techniques /Employee Empowerment
    c. ☐ Reduction in Work Hours
    d. ☐ Other:_____

5. What one item if improved, would have the greatest impact on retention of Public Safety Communication Dispatchers with the City of Joplin?
    a. ☐ Salary
    b. ☐ Benefits
    c. ☐ Management
    d. ☐ Physical Work Environment
    e. ☐ Work Hours / Shifts
    f. ☐ Training
    g. ☐ Pre-Employment Screening
    h. ☐ Other_____

Appendix B

Public Safety Communication Dispatcher

Employee Retention Questionnaire
Current Employee ☒

Length of Employment : 1 to 6 months ☐
6 months to 1 year ☐
1 year to 3 years ☐
3 years to 5 years ☐
5 years to 10 years ☐
10 year or more ☐

1. What do you believe is the primary reason for personnel leaving employment as a Public Safety Communication Dispatchers?
    i.   ☐ Insufficient Salary
    j.   ☐ Insufficient Retirement
    k.   ☐ Pursue Other Career Goals
    l.   ☐ Physical Working Conditions
    m. ☐ High Stress Working Conditions
    n.   ☐ Work Hours/Shift Work
    o.   ☐ Other_____
    Comments_____
    _____

2. Please rate the following issues as they relate to your job satisfaction and performance in the Public Safety Communication Dispatcher position.

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
a. Salary	☐	☐	☐	☐
b. Benefits	☐	☐	☐	☐
c. Retirement Plan	☐	☐	☐	☐
d. Physical Working Conditions	☐	☐	☐	☐
e. Understanding of Job Prior to Hire	☐	☐	☐	☐
f. Work Hours/Shift Work	☐	☐	☐	☐

g. Training and Support   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐

h. Employee Involvement   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐
   in the Organization
   (Team Management)

i. Peer Relations   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐

3. Have you ever considered leaving your position as a Public Safety Communication
Dispatcher   in Joplin?   Yes ☐   No ☐
          If Yes, Why:

_____

_____

4. What one item if improved, would have the greatest impact on working conditions as
Public Safety   Communication Dispatcher with the City of Joplin?
          a. ☐ Physical Work Environment
          b. ☐ Team Management Techniques /Employee Empowerment
          c. ☐ Reduction in Work Hours
          d. ☐ Other:_____

5. What one item if improved, would have the greatest impact on retention of Public
Safety Communication Dispatchers with the City of Joplin?

          a. ☐ Salary
          b. ☐ Benefits
          c. ☐ Management
          e. ☐ Physical Work Environment
          f. ☐ Work Hours / Shifts
          g. ☐ Training
          h. ☐ Pre-Employment Screening
          i. ☐ Other_____

Appendix C

Questionnaire Cover Letter

Gary S. Trulson
3020 North Park Ave.
Joplin, MO
64801

October 16, 2007

Dear Ms. _____

I am the current fire chief in Joplin and a student in the National Fire Academy Executive Officer program. As part of my requirements for one of my classes I am conducting an applied research project. The focus of my research is "Employee Retention in 911 – Communication Centers. My intent is to investigate issues causing turnover, in order to propose future solutions.

My records indicate you left employment as an Emergency Communication Technician with the City of Joplin within the past five years. I would greatly appreciate your help by taking approximately 5 minutes to complete the enclosed questionnaire. This questionnaire is completely confidential and information from it will only be utilized in my research paper. I have enclosed a self addressed stamped envelope for your use and because of completion deadlines I ask that you complete and return the questionnaire by October 11, 2004. Thanks again for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Gary S. Trulson
National Fire Academy Student

Appendix D

Public Safety Communication Dispatcher
Employee Retention Questionnaire
Former Employee
Results

Total Number of Respondents: **7** Respondents

Length of Employment	Number of Respondents
1 month to 6 months	0 Respondents
6 months to 1 year	2 Respondents – 29%
1 year to 3 years	1 Respondents – 14%
3 years to 5 years	0 Respondents
5 years to 10 years	3 Respondents – 43%
10 or more years	1 Respondents – 14%

1. What was your primary reason for leaving employment as a Public Safety Communication Dispatchers in Joplin?

Primary Reason for Leaving	Primary Answers	Secondary Answers
Insufficient Salary	0 Respondents	0 Respondents
Insufficient Retirement	0 Respondents	0 Respondents
Pursue Other Career Goals	1 Respondent – 14%	0 Respondents
Physical Working Conditions	0 Respondents	0 Respondents
High Stress Working Conditions	1 Respondents – 14%	2 Respondents
Work Hours/Shift Work	2 Respondents – 29%	0 Respondents
Other	3 Respondents – 43%	0 Respondents

Comments: Two of respondents listed multiple answers for this question. For the table above the first answer listed was considered primary. Addition answers are indicated in the third column. Three respondents listed "other", 1 indicated that all of the listed issues needed to be addressed, 1 stated they left because of poor administration and 1 retired.

2. Please rate the following issues as they relate to your job satisfaction and performance in the Public Safety Communication Dispatcher position. Fair

Issue	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Salary	1 Resp. - 14%	4 Resp. – 57%	1 Resp. – 14%	1 Resp. 14%
Benefits	1 Resp. - 14%	4 Resp. - 57%	1 Resp. – 14%	1 Resp. – 14%
Retirement Plan	1 Resp. - 14%	3 Resp. – 43%	1 Resp. – 14%	2 Resp. - 29%
Physical Working Conditions	1 Resp. - 14%	5 Resp. – 71%	1 Resp. – 14%	0 Respondents
Understanding of Job Prior to Hire	0 Respondents	6 Resp. – 86%	1 Resp. - 14%	0 Respondents
Work Hours/Shift Work	0 Respondents	2 Resp. – 29%	2 Resp. – 29%	3 Resp. – 43%
Training and Support	0 Respondents	2 Resp. – 29%	3 Resp. - 43%	2 Resp. – 29%
Employee Involvement in the Organization	0 Respondents	1 Resp. -14%	2 Resp. – 29%	4 Resp. – 57%
Peer Relations	0 Respondents	3 Resp. – 43%	3 Resp. 43%	1 Resp. – 14%

3.   Have you been employed as a Public Safety Communication Dispatcher since leaving your position in Joplin?

Yes	No
1 Respondents - 14%	6 Respondents – 86%

4. What one item if improved would have the greatest impact on working conditions as Public Safety   Communication Dispatcher with the City of Joplin?

Issue	Number of Respondents
Physical Work Environment	0 Respondents
Team Management Techniques /Employee Empowerment	3 Respondents – 43%
Reduction in Work Hours	3 Respondents – 43%
Other	1 Respondent – 14%

Comments: The respondent reporting the "other" issue indicated "management/supervision" change as a priority.

5. What one item if improved would have the greatest impact on retention of Public Safety Communication Dispatchers with the City of Joplin?

Issue	Number of Respondents
Salary	1 Respondents – 14%
Benefits	0 Respondents
Management	2 Respondents – 29%
Physical Work Environment	0 Respondents
Work Hours / Shifts	2 Respondents – 29%
Training	1 Respondents – 14%
Pre-Employment Screening	0 Respondents
Other	1 Respondents – 14%

Comments: One respondent listing "other" indicated that all of the listed issues needed to be addressed.

Appendix E
Public Safety Communication Dispatcher
Employee Retention Questionnaire
Current Employee Results

Total Number of Respondents: **13** Respondents

Length of Employment	Number of Respondents
1 month to 6 months	3 Respondents – 23%
6 months to 1 year	3 Respondents – 23%
1 year to 3 years	2 Respondents – 15%
3 years to 5 years	0 Respondents
5 years to 10 years	1 Respondents – 8%
10 or more years	4 Respondents – 31%

1. What do you believe is the primary reason for personnel leaving employment as a Public Safety Communication Dispatchers?

Primary Reason for Leaving	Primary Answers	Secondary Answers
Insufficient Salary	5 Respondents – 38%	0 Respondents
Insufficient Retirement	0 respondents	1 Respondents
Pursue Other Career Goals	1 respondent – 8%	0 Respondents
Physical Working Conditions	0 respondents	0 Respondents
High Stress Working Conditions	4 Respondents – 31%	2 respondents
Work Hours/Shift Work	3 respondents – 23%	6 Respondents
Other	0 Respondents	0 Respondents

  Comments: A number of respondents listed multiple answers for this question. For the table above the first answer listed was considered primary. Addition answers are indicated in the third column.

2. Please rate the following issues as they relate to your job satisfaction and performance in the Public Safety Communication Dispatcher position. Fair

Issue	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Salary	0 Respondents	6 Respondents 46%	4 Respondents 31%	3 Respondents 23%
Benefits	1 Respondent 8%	3 Respondents 23%	8 Respondents 61%	1 Respondents 8%
Retirement Plan	0 Respondents	5 Respondents	1 Respondent	7 Respondents

		38%	8%	54%
Physical Working Conditions	0 Respondents	5 Respondents 38%	7 Respondents 54%	1 Respondent 8%
Understanding of Job Prior to Hire	1 Respondent 8%	6 Respondents 46%	4 Respondents 31%	2 Respondents 15%
Work Hours/Shift Work	0 Respondents	3 Respondents 23%	5 Respondents 38%	5 Respondents 38%
Training and Support	1 Respondent 8%	3 Respondents 23%	4 respondents 31	4 Respondents 31%
Issue	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Employee Involvement in the Organization	1 Respondent 8%	3 Respondents 23%	7 Respondents 54%	2 Respondents 15%
Peer Relations	2 Respondents 15%	5 Respondents 38%	5 Respondents 38%	1 Respondent 8%

6.   Have you ever considered leaving your position as a Public Safety Communication Dispatcher   in Joplin?   Yes   No

10 Respondents -77%	3 Respondents - 23%

If Yes, Why:
   f.   Frustration with supervisors. (1)
   g.   To reduce stress. (3)
   h.   Obtain better salary. (2)
   i.   Unable or willing to work 12 hour shifts.(2)
   j.   Schedule not conducive to family life. (2)

7. What one item if improved would have the greatest impact on working conditions as Public Safety   Communication Dispatcher with the City of Joplin?

Issue   Number of Respondents

Physical Work Environment	3 Respondents – 23%
Team Management Techniques /Employee Empowerment	3 Respondents – 23%
Reduction in Work Hours	6 Respondents – 46%
Other	1 Respondent – 8%

Comments: The respondent presenting the "other" issue reported that breaks and lunch are taken in the dispatch area (while still answering calls that may come in). No real breaks are received, leading to stress and fatigue.

8. What one item if improved would have the greatest impact on retention of Public Safety Communication Dispatchers with the City of Joplin?

Issue	Number of Respondents
Salary	4 Respondents – 31%
Benefits	2 Respondents – 15%
Management	0 Respondents
Physical Work Environment	0 Respondents
Work Hours / Shifts	5 Respondents – 38%
Training	0 Respondents
Pre-Employment Screening	0 Respondents
Other	2 Respondents – 15%

Comments: The 2 respondents listing "other" indicated that all of the listed issues needed to be addressed.

Appendix F

Public Safety Communication Dispatcher
Employee Retention Questionnaire
Communication Center Director ☐
Human Resource Director   ☐

Type of Center: Number of Employees :
    Police   ☐   5 to 10   ☐
    Fire   ☐   11 to 30   ☐
    EMS   ☐   31 to 50   ☐
    Combined ☐   51 or more ☐

Employee Turnover History
5 year (01-01-1999 to 0101-2004)

Voluntary   Involuntary
    Number   Number

    Percentage   Percentage

1. What do you believe is the primary reason for personnel leaving employment as a
Public Safety Communication Dispatchers in your agency?
    a. ☐ Insufficient Salary
    b. ☐ Insufficient Retirement
    c. ☐ Pursue Other Career Goals
    d. ☐ Poor Physical Working Conditions
    e. ☐ High Stress Working Conditions
    f. ☐ Work Hours/Shift Work
    g. ☐ Other_____
    Comments_____
        _____

2. Please rate the following issues, as you believe they relate to job satisfaction and
performance of Public Safety Communication Dispatchers in your organization.

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
a. Salary	☐	☐	☐	☐

b. Benefits ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

c. Retirement Plan ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

d. Physical Working Conditions ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

e. Understanding of Job ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
   Prior to Hire

f. Work Hours/Shift Work ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

g. Training and Support ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

h. Employee Involvement ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
  in the Organization
  (Team Management)
i. Peer Relations ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

3. What one item if improved, would have the greatest impact on working
   conditions as Public Safety   Communication Dispatcher in your agency?
     a. ☐ Physical Work Environment
     b. ☐ Team Management Techniques /Employee Empowerment
     c. ☐ Reduction in Work Hours
     d. ☐ Other:_____

4. What one item if improved, would have the greatest impact on retention of Public
   Safety Communication Dispatchers in your agency?
     a. ☐ Salary
     b. ☐ Benefits
     c. ☐ Management
     d. ☐ Physical Work Environment
     e. ☐ Work Hours / Shifts
     f. ☐ Training
     g. ☐ Pre-Employment Screening
     h. ☐ Other_____

5. Has your agency taken any steps to address retention issues involving Public
   Safety Communication Dispatchers?
   Comprehensive Program ☐   Some Steps ☐   None ☐
   Program Name or Description:

6. If your agency has taken some initiatives on retention, what areas did you focus on?
    a. ☐ Salaries
    b. ☐ Benefits/Retirement
    c. ☐ Hiring Process
    d. ☐ Staffing/Hours
    e. ☐ Working Conditions
    f. ☐ Recognition
    g. ☐ Other_____

   Comments:

7. What results have been observed?

    a. ☐ Decreased turnover.
    b. ☐ Increased moral.
    c. ☐ Increased productivity
    d. ☐ Increase in applicants for openings
    e. ☐ Other _____
    f. ☐ No noticeable change

   Comments:

Gary S. Trulson
3020 North Park Ave.
Joplin, MO
64801

Appendix G

Communication Director Cover Letter

October 16, 2007

Public Safety Communications Directors,

I am the current fire chief in Joplin, MO and a student in the National Fire Academy Executive Officer program. As part of my requirements for one of my classes I am conducting an applied research project. The focus of my research is "Employee Retention in 911 – Communication Centers". My intent is to investigate issues causing turnover, in order to propose future solutions.

 I would greatly appreciate your help by taking approximately 5 minutes to complete the enclosed questionnaire. This questionnaire is completely confidential and information from it will only be utilized in my research paper. This questionnaire is a fill document that you may complete and "save as a Word Document" and then return to me as an attachment in a reply e-mail at garyt911@juno.com. Because of completion deadlines I ask that you complete and return the questionnaire by October 11, 2004. If you would like a copy of the completed research paper please indicate that on your e-mail. Thanks again for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Gary S. Trulson
National Fire Academy Student

417-434-2312

Appendix H

Public Safety Communication Dispatcher
Employee Retention Questionnaire
Communication Director
Results
Total Number of Respondents: **30** Respondents

Type Center   Number Employees
          Number Respondents

Police	3
Fire	0
EMS	0
Combined	27

5 to 10	7 Respondents
11 to 30	18 Respondents
31 to 50	4 Respondents
51 or more	1 Respondent

Employee Turnover History
5 Year (01-01-1990 to 01-01-2004)

Total Turnover 5 Year Period	Number of Respondents
7% to 20%	7 Respondents – 23%
23 % to 65%	11 Respondents – 37%
75% to 140%	10 Respondents – 34%
175% to 400%	2 Respondents – 6%

Comments:

1.What do you believe is the primary reason for personnel leaving employment as Public
Safety Communication Dispatchers in your agency?

Primary Reason for Leaving	Primary Answers	Secondary Answers
Insufficient Salary	9 Respondents 30%	0 Respondents
Insufficient Retirement	0 Respondents	0 Respondents
Pursue Other Career Goals	5 Respondent 17%	0 Respondents
Physical Working Conditions	1 respondents 3%	0 Respondents
High Stress Working Conditions	5 Respondents 17%	2 Respondents
Work Hours/Shift Work	8 respondents 27%	2 Respondents
Other	2 Respondents 6%	0 Respondents

Comments: a. Two respondents listed multiple answers for this question. For the table above the first answer listed was considered primary. Addition answers are indicated in the third column.
b. Two respondents reported "other" issues;
      1. Improper pre-employment screening.
      2. Personal conflict between coworkers and supervisors.

2. Please rate the following issues as you believe they relate to job satisfaction and performance in the Public Safety Communication Dispatchers in your organization.

Issue	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Salary	5 Respondents 17%	18 Respondents 60%	6 Respondents 19%	1 Respondents 4%
Benefits	3 Respondent 10 %	20 Respondents 67%	6 Respondents 19%	1 Respondents 4%
Retirement Plan	4 Respondents 13%	11 Respondents 37%	12 Respondent 40%	2 Respondents 8%
Physical Working Conditions	10 Respondents 34%	13 Respondents 43%	6 Respondents 19%	1 Respondent 4%
Understanding of Job Prior to Hire	4 Respondent 13%	12 Respondents 40%	10 Respondents 34%	4 Respondents 13%
Work Hours/Shift Work	4 Respondents 13%	11 Respondents 37%	11 Respondents 37%	4 Respondents 13%
Training and Support	7 Respondent 23%	16 Respondents 53%	6 Respondents 20%	1 Respondents 4%
Employee Involvement in the Organization	4 Respondent 13%	14 Respondents 47%	8 Respondents 27%	4 Respondents 13%
Peer Relations	5 Respondents 17%	17 Respondents 57%	5 Respondents 16%	3 Respondent 10%

3.What one item if improved would have the greatest impact on working conditions as Public Safety   Communication Dispatcher in your agency?

Issue	Number of Respondents
Physical Work Environment	3 Respondents - 10%
Team Management Techniques /Employee Empowerment	10 Respondents - 33%
Reduction in Work Hours	11 Respondents - 37%
Other	6 Respondents - 20%

Comments: Six respondents reported "other" issues.
1. Call volume increase.
2. Relationship between officers and dispatchers.
3. Closures of calls and relationships with agencies.
4. More team members per shift.
5. Acknowledgement.
6. Public safety type retirement (20 and out)

4.What one item if improved would have the greatest impact on retention of Public Safety Communication Dispatchers in your agency?

Issue	Number of Respondents
Salary	13 Respondents – 43%
Benefits	3 Respondents – 10%
Management	2 Respondents – 8%
Physical Work Environment	1 Respondents – 4%
Work Hours / Shifts	7 Respondents – 23%
Training	0 Respondents
Pre-Employment Screening	4 Respondents – 13%
Other	0 Respondents

Comments:

5. Has your agency taken any steps to address retention issues involving Public Safety Communication Dispatchers?

Steps Taken	Number Respondents
Comprehensive Program	4 Respondents – 13%
Some Steps	17 Respondents – 57%
None	9 Respondents – 30 %

6. If your agency has taken steps to address retention, what area did you focus on?

Area of Focus	Number of Respondents
Salaries	8 Respondents – 38%
Benefits and Retirement	5 Respondents – 24%
Hiring Process	14 Respondents – 67%
Staffing / Hours	10 Respondents – 48%
Working Conditions	11 Respondents – 52%
Recognition	10 Respondents – 48%
Other	0 Respondents

Comments: These responses came from the 21 agencies that reported taking some type of action to improve employee retention. They were allowed multiple answers.

7.What results have been observed?

Observed Results of Retention Efforts	Number Respondents
Decreased Turnover	10 Responses – 48%
Increased Moral	10 Responses – 48%
Increased Productivity	2 Responses – 10%
Increased Applicants for Openings	4 Responses – 20%

Other	0 Responses
No Noticeable Change	5 Responses – 24%

Comments: These responses came from the 21 agencies that reported taking some type of action to improve employee retention. They were allowed multiple answers.

Appendix I

NAGNA
Interview Questions

NAGNA ☐

Number of Employees:

Nationwide _____

MO _____

Employee Turnover History
5 year (01-01-1999 to 0101-2004)

Voluntary   5/yr   1/yr   Involuntary
   5/yr   1/yr
   Number   _____   _____   Number   _____   _____

   Percentage _____   _____Percentage _____   _____

1. What do you believe is the primary reason for personnel leaving employment Geriatric Nursing Assistants?
    p. ☐ Insufficient Salary
    q. ☐ Insufficient Retirement
    r. ☐ Pursue Other Career Goals
    s. ☐ Poor Physical Working Conditions
    t. ☐ High Stress Working Conditions
    u. ☐ Work Hours/Shift Work
    v. ☐ Other_____
    Comments_____
    _____

2. Please rate the following issues, as you believe they relate to job satisfaction and performance of Geriatric Nursing Assistants.

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
a. Salary	☐	☐	☐	☐
b. Benefits	☐	☐	☐	☐
c. Retirement Plan	☐	☐	☐	☐

d. Physical Working Conditions ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

e. Understanding of Job ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

f. Work Hours/Shift Work ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

g. Training and Support ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

h. Employee Involvement ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
   in the Organization
   (Team Management)
i. Peer Relations ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

3. What one item if improved, would have the greatest impact on working conditions as Geriatric Nursing Assistants?

4.
    a. ☐ Physical Work Environment
    b. ☐ Team Management Techniques /Employee Empowerment
    c. ☐ Reduction in Work Hours
    d. ☐ Other:_____

5. What one item if improved, would have the greatest impact on retention of Geriatric Nursing Assistants?

    a. ☐ Salary
    b. ☐ Benefits
    c. ☐ Management
    d. ☐ Physical Work Environment
    e. ☐ Work Hours / Shifts
    f. ☐ Training
    g. ☐ Pre-Employment Screening
    h. ☐ Other_____

6. Has your industry taken any steps to address retention issues involving Geriatric Nursing Assistants?
Comprehensive Program ☐   Some Steps ☐   None ☐
    Program Name or
    Description:_____

7. If your industry has taken some initiatives on retention, what areas did you focus on?
    a. ☐ Salaries
    b. ☐ Benefits/Retirement
    c. ☐ Hiring Process
    d. ☐ Staffing/Hours

e. ☐ Working Conditions
f. ☐ Recognition
g. ☐ Other_____

Comments:_____
_____

8. What results have been observed?

a. ☐ Decreased turnover.
b. ☐ Increased moral.
c. ☐ Increased productivity
d. ☐ Increase in applicants for openings
e. ☐ Other _____
f. ☐ No noticeable change

Comments: