

Running Head: Employee Turnover

Solving Employee Turnover within the Cripple Creek Fire Department

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CERTIFICATION STATEMENT

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

Signed _____

Abstract

Employee turnover can have a significant impact on an organizations ability to implement long range strategic planning and lessons opportunities for organizations to retain knowledge and experience within employee ranks. The problem is the Cripple Creek Fire Department has had a history of employee turnover, which has led to a decrease in the department's ability to develop long range employee development opportunities and has reduced the level of experience within the firefighter ranks. The purpose of this research will be to identify what major factors influence employees to leave an organization and what can be done in the future to reduce employee turnover. A descriptive research method was utilized to answer the following questions: (a) What similar issues can be identified within other organizations in relation to employee turnover? (b) What factors do organizational leaders feel are most important in retaining employees? (c) What factors do employees feel are most important in employee retention? (d) What are the long term implications of employee turnover?

The research was completed by distributing questionnaires' to departments throughout the country of similar size and complexity as the Cripple Creek Fire Department. A literature review was conducted to identify employee retention issues and review how other organizations were dealing with employee turnover. The results of the research indicated that salary and benefits were the primary issues causing employee turnover within the organizations that responded to the questionnaire. Departmental Leadership was also identified as a significant contributing factor to employee turnover within several organizations. A recommendation was made to undertake a comprehensive compensation survey within the region to include comparisons of salaries and benefits of larger fire departments within the region. Further, a

recommendation was made to implement retention programs within both the fire chief's position, as well as the staff positions.

CONTENTS

Certification Statement2

Abstract3

Table of Contents5

Introduction.....7

Background and Significance8

Literature Review.....12

Procedures.....17

Limitations18

Results.....19

Discussion.....27

Recommendations.....33

References.....38

Appendix A- Fire Chief Questionnaire Results40

Figure A1-Is your department classified as a fire district, municipal city or township?.....40

Figure A2- How many full-time staff members do you have?.....40

Figure A3- How often do full-time employees leave your department?.....41

Figure A4- When employees leave your department, which statement(s) best describes why they left?.....	41
Figure A5- If you could increase only one of the following, which do you feel would have the greatest impact on employee retention within your department?.....	42
Figure A6- For a department your size, do you feel the amount of employee turnover within your department is normal?.....	42
Figure A7-How many different fire chief's has your de[artment has within the past 10 years?.....	43
Figure A8- Does your department have programs that specifically focus on employee retention ?	43
Figure A9- Please select the statement(s) that best described your recruiting strategy.....	44
Figure A10- Does your department have a policy requirning full-time employees to live within a certain distance of the department?.....	44
Appendix B.....	45
Figure B1- How often do full-time employees leave your department?.....	45
Figure B2- When employees leave, which statement(s) best describes why they left?.....	45
Figure B3- If you could increase only one of the following, which do you feel would have the greatest impact on employee retention within your department?.....	46
Figure B4- For a department your size, do you feel the amount of employee turnover within your department is normal?.....	46
Figure B5- How big of an impact do you feel fire department leadership (i.e. fire chief, assistant/deputy chief) has on employee retention within any fire department?.....	47
Figure B6- How big of an impact do you feel the governing board (i.e. city council, board of supervisors etc.) has on employee retention within any fire department?.....	47

Introduction

Solving Employee Turnover within the Cripple Creek Fire Department

The Cripple Creek Fire Department has a small compliment of full-time staff members that protect the City of Cripple Creek and surrounding areas. The problem is the Cripple Creek Fire Department has had a history of employee turnover, which has led to a decrease in the department's ability to develop long range employee development opportunities and has reduced the level of experience within the firefighter ranks. The purpose of this research will be to identify what major factors influence employees to leave an organization and what can be done in the future to reduce employee turnover. A descriptive research method was utilized to answer the following questions: (a) What similar issues can be identified within other organizations in relation to employee turnover? (b) What factors do organizational leaders feel are most important in retaining employees? (c) What factors do employees feel are most important in employee retention? (d) What are the long term implications of employee turnover?

The Cripple Creek Fire Department is one of only two fire departments within the region that have a paid fire department. The majority of fire departments within the surrounding area are volunteer; therefore, making it very difficult to recruit volunteer firefighters. The surrounding volunteer departments have recruited many of the available volunteers, so the Cripple Creek Fire Department relies heavily on the full-time staff to be very knowledgeable, experienced and prepared to deal with emergencies within the community.

The primary source of the Cripple Creek Fire Departments' turnover are the larger cities such as Denver, Colorado Springs and Pueblo that pay a much higher wage to firefighters. These organizations have traditionally been the primary employer that has hired firefighters from the Cripple Creek Fire Department. The City of Cripple Creek is much smaller and historically been unable to compete with the compensation packages of these larger departments. The department has lost 23 confirmed employees over the past ten years. As employees have left the Cripple Creek Fire Department over the years, the department has earned a reputation of being a "stepping stone" department for employees to begin their careers within the fire service. This reputation has created an environment that has made it difficult to attract quality long term employees when recruiting firefighters. The typical firefighter hired by the Cripple Creek Fire Department only plans on working there until they are hired by one of the larger departments. This behavior has created an environment that perpetually fosters high levels of employee turnover and has created frustration throughout the members of the department, as well as city officials.

Background and Significance

The City of Cripple creek is located within Teller County, Colorado which has a population of 22,243 (United States Census, 2007). The emergency services agencies within Teller County consist of the City of Cripple Creek, City of Victor, City of Woodland Park, Northeast Teller County Fire District (NETCO), Divide Fire Protection District (DFPD), 4 Mile Fire Protection District, Southwest Teller County Emergency Medical Services (SWTCEMS), Ute Pass Regional Ambulance District, as well as Lake George Fire Protection District. Teller County is mostly rural mountain communities and only has three small cities.

The City of Cripple Creek has a population of 1,115 (United States Census, 2000). The Cripple Creek Fire Department service area includes 1.5 square miles of Teller County. The Cripple Creek Fire Department not only serves the City of Cripple Creek, but also services the southern out-lying rural Teller County residents. The estimated total population served by Cripple Creek Fire Department is over 5,000 residents.

The City of Cripple Creek is one of three cities' within the state of Colorado that allows limited stakes gaming. The limited stakes gaming, as well as the long history of gold mining provides tourism as the major economic support for the city. The City of Cripple Creek is located approximately one hour West of Colorado Springs, Colorado, and is considered somewhat isolated from services typically found within larger communities. The closest hospital is approximately 30 minutes from the city and only provides limited emergency medical services. The majority of major trauma cases are flown by helicopter to Colorado Springs for treatment. The primary ground emergency medical service is provided by Southwest Teller County EMS (SWTCEMS), which is housed within the Cripple Creek Fire Department in the City of Cripple Creek. SWTCEMS is staffed by 2 paramedics and 1 Emergency Medical Technician 24 hours a day. Their staffing is supplemented by Cripple Creek Fire Department as needed. Cripple Creek Fire Department has the primary responsibility for fire protection within the city limits of Cripple Creek and has mutual aid agreements, as well as memorandums of understanding with surrounding agencies for unincorporated areas. In total, Cripple Creek Fire Department protects a population of over 5,000 residents within 50 square miles. Cripple Creek Fire Department has 14 paid personnel with a minimum staffing level of four firefighters per shift. Mutual aid response is very limited within the immediate area at certain times because of an overwhelming majority of volunteer agencies within the area.

The City of Cripple Creek relies heavily on tourism for its economic stability and receives over 2,000,000 visitors a year. The City of Cripple Creek is an isolated community and must be very self reliant. The majority of fire departments within the region are all volunteer, and depending on the time and day, may not be able to deliver back-up support to the City of Cripple Creek.

The City of Victor is located approximately 8 miles from Cripple Creek and has a population of 406 (United States Census, 2008) and relies completely on emergency medical services transport from Southwest Teller County Emergency Medical Services based out of Cripple Creek. The City of Victor also heavily relies on fire and police protection support from the City of Cripple Creek.

The City of Woodland Park has a population of 6,501 (United States Census, 2008) and is located within Teller County. The City of Woodland Park is provided with fire protection from Northeast Teller County Fire Protection District and emergency medical service transport service from Ute Pass Regional Ambulance District. Woodland Park is one of the larger cities within Teller County and with the outlying population has the most concentrated population within Teller County.

The remaining areas within Teller County are provided emergency services through mostly volunteer organizations and have very limited population. There are many areas within the southern portion of Teller County that are not supported with dedicated emergency services and are under general authority of the Teller County Sherriff.

The significance of this issue is critical to the operational readiness of emergency services within the City of Cripple Creek. The turnover issue has been so significant; the department's ability to attract and retain employees has put a strain on the level of experience

within the department. The current most senior firefighters within the department have approximately 4 years of service with the department. Over time, the turnover has eroded the departments experience and created a safety issue because of the lack of experience. This also created an environment that filling officer positions within the department has become very difficult. The lack of experience within the firefighter ranks has become a critical issue in determining if promotions can be made within the departmental ranks, or if candidates should be recruited from an outside organization.

The turnover within the Cripple Creek Fire Department has not only created problems within experience, it has created a perpetual hiring process within the department. The department's leadership has found it difficult to focus on future strategic planning because they are inundated within hiring and training new firefighters. This has created a hiring cycle within the department that allows little time for long range planning within the department. This not only impacts the chief officers, the front line fire officers are experiencing the same effect. The time that should be dedicated to honing their skills and improving teamwork within their shift, is being spent training new firefighters on their shift. This has decreased their ability to train on new firefighting techniques and improve safety on their shift.

The turnover within the department has not only placed an increased stress on the leadership, the firefighters are also being over burdened. When the vacancies are created by the turnover, the remaining firefighters are left to fill the overtime shifts. This creates an increased opportunity for firefighters to become fatigued and cut corners when it comes to safety. They are also more susceptible to stress and burnout that can not only affect their performance at work, but can place a greater burden on their family. The turnover within the department clearly has an impact from the top levels of leadership all the way to the firefighter's families at home.

The turnover issue within the Cripple Creek Fire Department is directly related to the Executive Leadership course taught at the National Fire Academy (National Fire Academy, 2005). This research directly relates to the United States Fire Administration (USFA) operational objective “Improve the fire and emergency services’ professional status” (National Fire Academy, 2005).

Literature Review

A literature review was conducted to better understand what findings others have published in relation to this subject. The literature review will include both public and private sector information relating to employee turnover.

One of the greatest factors influencing employee turnover today is the economy, which has kept many employees from leaving their current employers because they fear jeopardizing their position in uncertain economic times. The current job market tends to favor the employer, but could change as the economy improves. One study found that 47 % of organizations say the current economic slump has had a positive effect on employee turnover. Of the organizations polled, only 20 % indicated they have increased their retention efforts. Many managers consider retaining their best employees as an important part of their long term success. The current economy has prevented many employers from funding retention efforts within the organization; however, they have identified retention as a major concern. It seems many companies are dropping the ball with regards to retention efforts. The survey showed that organizations that say they do have a retention program, only 44 % say they regularly review the program. The study also identified the high cost attached to employee turnover. Studies have shown that turnover rates can carry a price tag of \$25 billion across the United States with the cost of hiring and

training an hourly worker at 300 to 700 times the workers hourly wage. The Bureau of Labor and Statistics stated there could be 10 million more jobs available than employees to fill them by the end of 2010. As the economy improves, employees will seek other employment opportunities, especially those that have endured pay cuts, bonus loss and layoffs (McKeown 2010, p.22).

Looking specifically within sports management, employee turnover has many issues that can be valuable to better understanding employee turnover within the public and private sector. Felps, Heckman, Holtom and Harman (2009) found sports management scholars have examined the job embeddedness to better understand why sports industry employees remain with their organization. This study examined how job search behaviors of coworkers influence employees' decisions to leave the organization. This article suggests that when coworkers have a high occurrence of job searching, it can influence other employees in their willingness to voluntarily leave their organization.

Exploring the literature within the prison system and the Department of Corrections provide insight to the challenges facing the correctional facilities throughout the country. Turnover rates within correctional facilities ranged from a low of 3.8 % (New York) to a high of 41 % (Louisiana) in the year 2000. 34 % of states reported rates above a 20 % turnover rate and six percent fell into the range above 30 %. Evidence has shown that turnover of correctional officers is one of the main problems plaguing correctional agencies nationwide. One study asked what the main factor was that made it difficult to retain correctional officers and the primary reason was determined to be compensation. The study found that correctional agencies that paid a higher wage had a much lower turnover rate. Noncompetitive compensation was clearly the primary factor cited for difficulty in recruiting and retaining correctional officers. Other than compensation, other factors noted within the study were hours and shift work, inadequate

benefits and stress. The article went on to talk about the high costs associated with employee turnover. The cost of recruiting and training new staff was not the only significant impact noted within the article. It emphasized the stress and burnout on the remaining officers that are working overtime shifts, the more expensive overtime costs, inexperienced staff and overall lower morale with the agency (Lommel, 2004, p.54).

Examination of employee retention within the casino and gaming industry revealed an industry that struggles with this issues and has a great impact on their bottom line. Gaming organizations have become more and more competitive recruiting employees through incentive packages and offering little incentives such as free meals and enhanced retirement benefits. The overarching issues that cause turnover within the gaming industry is employee relationships with management. One report showed that 75 % of employees within the industry left the organization as a direct result of a poor relationship with their supervisor (Joyce, 2006). The overall employee turnover rate within the casino industry was as high as 70 % to 80 %. Effective leadership and relationships with supervisors are an integral role of retaining employees (Agrusa & Lema 2006, p.17).

Organizations within Information Technology (IT) Sector have also identified factors contributing to employee turnover within their workforce. Employee turnover within IT organizations can have devastating effects on their ability to provide quality professionals within the industry. Because this industry is so rapidly evolving and growing, when an employee leaves the organization, it not only decreases production, the organization losses valuable experience. It can also delay critical projects that further the company's ability to attract new customers. Turnover rates within the IT industry have been reported at 25 % to 35 % over the past five years. This article suggests that employee sentiments about their leaving the organization have a

great impact on overall employee turnover within the organization. When other colleagues express their desire to leave the organization it appears to increase the number over employees that seek employment elsewhere. Other factors contributing to employees leaving the organization are the overall sentiment of the IT industry. When the trade publications boast how valuable IT professionals are, it seems to increase the desire of employees throughout the industry to leave their current employer (Moore & Burke, 2002, p.74).

Reviewing employee turnover within public safety agencies has many similarities with the private sector. Carter 2005 found that leadership had a significant impact on membership retention within the volunteer fire service. The study found that volunteers left the organizations many times because of poor leadership from the fire chief. Respondents from the study identified the need for the departments' leadership to solicit ideas from the organization and better understand the needs of the members. It was also mentioned that some leaders will not support or share knowledge with members because they are afraid they will know more than they do. It was stated that it is important for the leadership of the department to support all members and give them the ability to grow within the department. Overall, the article identified poor leadership as the overarching reason for members leaving the department (Carter, 2005).

Employee turnover within public safety communications has also been identified as a contributor of an organizations success. Employee turnover within public safety communications has become critical in their ability to delivery services to the public. One article divided turnover into two categories: unavoidable and avoidable. It describes unavoidable turnover as when a employee leaves from reasons beyond the organizations control. It describes avoidable turnover as directly related to actions the organization has control over. The article focuses on the avoidable turnover as being: employee selection, training and environment. Employee selection

is an important factor in reducing employee turnover and considers when selecting candidates to focus on other factors besides technical skills. For example, a candidate with great typing skills may not be successful dispatchers. Training is also an important factor in reducing employee turnover. It suggests that if you are hiring the right employee for the position, not providing adequate training is the second most important factor in employee turnover. Inconsistency in teaching methods and overly high expectations are two of the most common pitfalls within the training factor. Lastly, creating an environment where employees want to work is the third reason for avoidable employee turnover. The primary environmental focus of this article was employee management relations. When employees feel valued and have good communications with management, it creates an environment conducive for employee retention (Solie, 2003).

Another factor considered in examining employee turnover is how human resource management can influence employee turnover. This article looked at relationships between quit rates of good and poor performers. Shaw, Dineen, Fang and Vellella (2009) found that under investing in employees and placing too great of expectations on employees to perform well are contributors. However, over investing in an employee typically produces less performance from an employee.

Ghiselli (1974) found that some employee's personality would lead them to change jobs frequently. He referred to it as the "Hobo Syndrome". This theory suggests that some employees are predisposition to move frequently between jobs. He stated this behavior didn't seem to come from logical thought, but simply an internal urge or impulse to change places. He related this to the migratory patterns of birds in referencing the understanding of why these employees behave in this way. This provides some understanding of how some factors of employee retention are simply unpredictable and unavoidable.

Overall employee attitudes can be a significant factor in understanding employee turnover. Turnover can have undesirable effects on an organization, its employee and how the organization is viewed within the workforce. The cost of employee turnover can obviously have a negative impact on the organization; however, the damage to the reputation of the company can have far greater consequences. If an employer is viewed as having high employee turnover, it could give the impression the company is a bad employer and keep quality employees from seeking employment with the company (Shahnawaz & Jafri, 2009, p. 159).

Procedures

The procedures for completing this applied research project began with identifying a problem statement and research questions to focus the scope of the research. The research questions were answered by a questionnaire, as well as a comprehensive literature review. An evaluative research method was utilized to obtain information related to answering the research questions and addressing the problem statement.

The research was completed by distributing questionnaires' to fire departments throughout the country with 40 or fewer employees and no more than two fire stations to ensure feedback was received from fire departments of similar size. Two questionnaires were distributed, one directed to the chief of the department and one directed to the employees of the same departments. Fifty fire departments were selected to receive the questionnaire in each category. The questionnaire distributed to the fire chief was specifically designated for the head of the department; however, the staff questionnaire was directed to all staff members that worked for the chief and did not delineate between ranks. The selected departments were identified from the United States Fire Administration web site through the search feature. The above referenced

criterion was entered into the data base to identify the departments to receive the questionnaire. The respondents were told they would remain anonymous to ensure the data would be as accurate as possible. During the beginning stages of the research, several of the staff respondents indicated they would not feel comfortable answering the questionnaire because of fear of retribution from their department. The questionnaires were then both modified to remove any information that could identify the department, or the department members that responded to the questionnaire.

The remainder of the research was completed through a comprehensive literature review which reviewed related materials from employee turnover and job satisfaction among the public and private sector. The literature review further directed the research towards understanding the general issues within employee turnover and how organizations, as well as how industry sectors viewed turnover. The literature review materials were obtained through the Learning Resources Center at the National Fire Academy, University of Michigan, University of Colorado and Pikes Peak Community College. All information obtained from the above referenced source was secured through interlibrary loans and correspondence. Further information was obtained from various trade publications listed within the reference section of this applied research project.

Limitations

An evaluative research method was utilized to identify various factors that could impact employee turnover within both public and private organizations. The questionnaire was limited to 50 fire departments throughout the country with 40 or fewer employees and two or fewer fire stations. Respondents within these departments were selected based entirely on the fact they were employed by fire departments similar in size to the Cripple Creek Fire Department. The

respondents are limited based on their position and socio economic factors were not examined in relation to employees leaving the departments. Other factors may have contributed to employees leaving; however, only the factors listed within the questionnaire were considered. The fire chief questionnaire requested information related to the type of department receiving the questionnaire to ensure some level of comparison between city fire departments and fire districts. Although the primary departments that responded were municipal fire departments, there was a smaller percentage that came from fire districts. An attempt was made to only compare municipal fire departments; however, even with best efforts to avoid fire districts, the questionnaire included approximately 25% fire districts.

Although 50 respondents were selected within each questionnaire, only 49 respondents returned the questionnaire directed to the department staff and only 36 returned the questionnaire directed towards the head of the department. Because this questionnaire was limited in scope, only broad information could be obtained from the results. No attempt has been made in this study to include all the views of all members of these departments.

Results

The results provided a framework for answering the research questions identified to address the problem statement. Two questionnaires were developed and distributed to 50 fire departments of similar size of the Cripple Creek Fire Department. These questionnaires were designed to obtain opinions of employees and fire chiefs as to the state of affairs within their department regarding employee turnover. The questionnaire directed at the fire chief asked the following ten questions:

1. Is your department classified as fire district or a municipal city, county or township?

2. How many full-time staff members do you have?
3. How often do full-time staff members leave your department?
4. When employees leave, which statement best describes why they left?
5. If you could increase only one of the following, which do you feel would have the greatest impact on employee retention within your department?
6. For a department your size, do you feel the amount of employee turnover within your department is normal?
7. How many different fire chiefs has your department had within the past 10 years?
8. Does your department have programs that specifically focus on employee retention?
9. Please select the statement(s) that best describes your recruiting strategy.
10. Does your department have a policy requiring full-time employees to live within a certain distance of the fire department?

The questionnaire distributed to staff members asked the following 6 questions:

1. How often do full-time employees leave your department?
2. When employees leave, which statement best describes why they left?
3. If you could increase only one of the following, which do you feel would have the greatest impact on employee retention within your department?
4. For a department your size, do you feel the amount of employee turnover within your department is normal?
5. How big of an impact do you feel that fire department leadership has on employee retention within any fire department?

6. How big of an impact do you feel the governing board of your department has on employee retention?

Research Question 1: What similar issues can be identified within other organizations in relation to employee turnover within the Cripple Creek Fire Department? The second question within the staff questionnaire identified why members of the department feel employees were leaving the organization. The staff questionnaire revealed that 77.1 % of respondents felt that employees left to make more money within another fire department (See figure B2). The same question was asked within the fire chief questionnaire and much less emphasis was placed on employees leaving for that reason. The fire chiefs felt that only 37.5 % left for more money, while 25 % felt employees left the fire service all together and 31.3 % felt employees left because they wanted to work within a busier department (See figure A4).

The staff questionnaire asked how often employees leave the department. One employee per year and one employee every couple of years were the primary responses at 35.4 % each. The fire chief questionnaire showed that overwhelmingly 43.8 % felt they only lost an employee every couple of years (See figure B1). The fire chief questionnaire also noted that employees rarely leave the department until they retire and they only lose an employee about every 5 years on average (See figure A3).

The staff questionnaire asked if the respondent could change only one thing, which would have the greatest impact on employee retention. Overwhelmingly, 62.5 % of the staff respondents felt that salary was the one thing they would change (See figure B3). The same question was asked within the fire chief questionnaire and only 50 % felt that it would be salary,

while 31.3 % felt that an increase in staffing would be the greatest factor in reducing employee turnover (See figure A5).

The staff questionnaire asked the respondent if they feel their department's turnover is normal compared to other departments. The staff respondents felt their department turnover was greater than other departments 31.3 % of the time and about average 31.3 % of the time (See figure B4). In contrast, when fire chiefs were asked the exact same question the respondents felt their department's turnover was lower 62.5 % compared to other departments (See figure A6).

The staff questionnaire asked if the department leadership had an impact on employee retention within their department and 66.7% felt that it had some impact, but employees left the organization for other reasons as well. The respondents also indicated they felt it was the single greatest factor in employee turnover within their fire department 22.9% of the time. This data combined indicates that 89.6% of the time leadership within the department contributes to employee turnover (See figure A5).

Research Question 2: (b) What factors do organizational leaders feel are most important in retaining employees? The questionnaire provided some insight for what fire chiefs of similar size departments thought were contributing factors to employee turnover. The chief respondents were asked what the structure of their department was in relation to it being a municipality or fire district. The chief respondents indicated that 76.5% of their departments were a municipal fire department within a city, county or township (See figure A1). This provided a true comparison of the type of departments within the questionnaire and the Cripple Creek Fire Department. Only 23.5 percents of the respondents indicated they were from a fire district (See figure A1). The fire chief questionnaire asked how many full-time members were within their department. The respondents indicated that 58.8% of their departments had between 11-20 full-time

employees. This proved a good comparison to the Cripple Creek Fire department having 14 full-time employees. The respondents indicated that 23.5% of them were within departments with 21-30 full-time members and 17.6% were from departments with greater than 30 employees (See figure A2). When the fire chief respondents were asked why employees leave the department, only 37.5% of them indicated that employees left to make more money within another department. The respondents indicated that 25% of them left the fire service all together and 31.3% felt employees went to busier departments to run more calls (See figure A4).

When the fire chief respondents were asked if they could only change one thing, which would have the greatest impact on employee turnover within their department, 50% indicated it would be salary. The chief respondents felt that 31.3% would increase staffing to reduce turnover and 18.8% felt that benefits would be the primary thing they would change (See figure A5).

When fire chiefs were asked if they felt that employee turnover within their department was normal for a department their size, overwhelmingly 62.5% felt that turnover was lower than other departments their size. The respondents felt that 18.8% of their departments were about average and 12.5% felt that it was about the same as other departments. This data combined would indicated that fire chief respondents felt their departments turnover was about the same or lower than other departments 93.8% of the time. Only 6.3% of fire chief respondents indicated they felt their departments turnover was greater than other departments their size (See figure A6).

Fire chief respondents were asked how many fire chiefs their department had over the past ten years, 43.8% indicated they had two or more chiefs within the department. The respondents indicated that 31.3% had 3-4 fire chiefs and 18.8% stated they only had one fire chief within the past ten years. Only 6.3% indicated they had 4 or more fire chiefs within the past

ten years. This data combined would indicate that 81.4% of departments had two or more fire chiefs over the past ten years (See figure A7).

The fire chief respondents were asked if their department had programs that were directed at employee retention and 81.3% indicated their department did not have programs for employee retention (See figure A8). They were also asked what their recruiting strategy was for hiring new employees. The respondents indicated they try and hire within their part-time or reserve firefighter ranks 50% of the time. The respondents also indicated that 37.5% of their departments provided no advantage to their status as part-time or reserve members of the department. The respondents indicated that 12.5% of their departments conduct a nationwide search and the highest scoring candidate is selected, while only 6.3% gave preference points for candidates that live within the jurisdiction (See figure A9).

Research Question 3: (c) What factors do employees feel are most important in employee retention within their department? Staff member respondents indicated that 35.4% felt that on average, only one employee leaves their department each year, while 35.4% felt that one employee leaves every couple of years. Only 16.7% indicated an employee only leaves the department about every five years and 12.5% felt that employees rarely leave until they retire. This combined data would indicate that 70.8% of the staff respondents indicated that one or two employees leave every couple of years (See figure B1).

The questionnaire directed at staff members primarily indicated that salary and benefits were the primary reason for employees leaving the department. Respondents felt that 77.1 % of the time employees left their department for more money. Staff respondents clearly felt this was the primary reason employees were leaving the department and they indicated that employees only left to work for a busier fire department 20.8 % of the time. When asking staff respondents

if they could increase only one item to improve employee retention they responded that it would be salary 62.5 % of the time. Respondents felt employee benefits were a concern, but only 16.7 % felt they would be the primary area to be increased. This data combined indicated that 89.6% of staff respondents felt the reason employees left their department was related to pay and benefits (See figure B2).

When staff respondents were asked if they could only change one thing to improve employee turnover within their department, 62.5% of respondents indicated it would be an increase in salary. Respondents indicated that 16.7% would improve benefits and 16.7% would increase staffing. The combined data would indicate that 79.2% would increase salary and benefits to improve employee turnover within their department. Only 4.2% indicated better working conditions would improve employee turnover within their department (See figure B3).

The staff respondents were asked how important the governing board was in relation to employee turnover. The respondents indicated that 68.8% of the time the governing board had some impact on employee turnover; however, employees left for other reasons. The respondents indicated that 18.8% felt that it had little or no impact on employee turnover, while 10.4% felt it was the single greatest factor in employee turnover. Only 2.1% felt the governing board had no impact on employee turnover (See figure B6).

Research Question 4: (d) What are the long term implications of employee turnover?

Much of the literature reviewed indicated that employee turnover is contagious. When employees within the organization were surrounded by employees that were actively seeking employment elsewhere, it provided an environment that fosters a greater level of employee turnover. One study examined how job search behaviors of coworkers influence employees' decisions to leave the organization. This article suggests that when coworkers have a high

occurrence of job searching, it can influence other employees in their willingness to voluntarily leave their organization (Felps, Heckman, Holtom and Harman, 2009). This article suggested that employee turnover is contagious and the more employees that leave an organization, the more prone they are to perpetuate the turnover.

Turnover rates within the Information Technology industry has been reported at 25 % to 35 % over the past five years. This article suggests that Information Technology employee sentiments about their leaving their organization have a great impact on overall employee turnover within the organization. This clearly shows a correlation between the levels of employee sentiment about the organization has a significant impact on the level of employee turnover within the organization. In the fire service, a high level of turnover can not only impact long range planning, it can have grave consequences in the level of experience within the department and reduce the level of safety within the organization.

When employee turnover becomes common place within the organization it will begin to deteriorate the reputation of the organization. If an employer is viewed as having high employee turnover, it could give the impression the company is a bad employer and keep quality employees from seeking employment with the company (Shahnawaz & Jafri, 2009). This has long term implications because the organization cannot retain, or attract quality employees; therefore, reducing the level of experience within the organization.

The quality of leadership within the department is also a factor of the long range implications of employee turnover. It was stated that it is important for the leadership of the department to support all members and give them the ability to grow within the department. Overall, the article identified poor leadership as the overarching reason for members leaving the department (Carter, 2005). Poor leadership was identified as a contributing factor of turnover.

The questionnaire indicated that a combined total of over 89% of the staff respondents indicated that leadership had some impact on why employees leave the organization (See figure B5).

Turnover within the fire chief's position was also identified as a factor in employee turnover.

The tenure within the fire chief's position was identified as a contributing factor for creating long range trends within employee turnover within the respondents. The questionnaire indicated that 81.4% of department respondents had two or more fire chiefs over the past ten years (See figure A7). The lack of consistency within the top position seems to have a direct correlation between the levels of turnover within the department through long range analysis.

Discussion

The overall findings within the questionnaire showed a disconnection between what staff members and fire chiefs feel are the main contributing factors for employee turnover within their departments. The fire chief was clearly more focused on several factors while staff members felt the primary reason was salary.

The economy has been one of the greatest factors in employee turnover within the past few years. The Cripple Creek Fire Department has had very low employee turnover over the past 24 months; however, the researcher feels this is not an indication of the future of employee retention within the department. The department has only lost one firefighter over the past 24 months, which would be considered a low employee turnover rate for the department. One study stated that 47 % of organizations say the current economic slump has had a positive effect on employee turnover and encouraged employees to remain with their current employer. As the economy improves, employees will seek other employment opportunities, especially those that

have endured pay cuts, bonus loss and layoffs (McKeown 2010, p.22). The economy is beginning to rebound and fire departments throughout the country are beginning to hire firefighters again. The current slowdown in regards to employee turnover will not withstand and unless changes are made within the department the turnover trend will continue as the economy improves.

Many factors other than the economy impact employee turnover. Felps, Heckman, Holtom and Harman (2009) found sports management scholars have examined the job embeddedness to better understand why sports industry employees remain with their organization. This article suggests that when coworkers have a high occurrence of job searching, it can influence other employees in their willingness to voluntarily leave their organization. This can be a significant factor within turnover, not only within the Cripple Creek Fire Department, but with fire departments throughout the country. When firefighters are in an environment where other employees are unhappy with their employer, it creates a situation where turnover is almost contagious. Firefighters when working shift work sometimes have time on their hands to discuss how their employer is not meeting their needs. When these discussions turn negative, it creates a negative attitude towards the employer and invites employees to seek an employer that can better meet their needs. Unfortunately, when employees learn that many of the issues they face are the same throughout the country, they have already changed positions and are now working for a new employer they are unsatisfied with. This behavior creates a perpetual cycle that causes an employee to go through several employers before they become satisfied with their position (Felps, Heckman, Holtom and Harman, 2009, p.549).

Compensation was identified within the questionnaire as the primary reason for employee turnover within the respective fire departments. This was also identified within other

organizations outside of the fire service. When examining correctional organizations, one study asked what the main factor was that made it difficult to retain correctional officers and the primary reason was determined to be compensation. The study found that correctional agencies that paid a higher wage had a much lower turnover rate. Noncompetitive compensation was clearly the primary factor cited for difficulty in recruiting and retaining correctional officers (Lommel, 2004, p.55). It seems the correctional organizations have a very difficult problem with employee turnover and it has been identified as primarily related to compensation. It appears the questionnaire directed at staff members had a much greater focus on salary as being the main issue; however, the same question asked of the fire chiefs indicated less importance on salary. It should be noted the departments surveyed seemed to have differing opinions between staff members and fire chiefs about the importance of salary.

Compensation was not the only issue identified within the questionnaire or the literature review. The questionnaire indicated from the staff respondents the relationship with the fire chief had some impact on turnover, however, employees left their department for other reasons. The gaming industry within the State of Mississippi has a very difficult time with employee turnover in relationship to supervisor and employee relations. The overarching issue that causes turnover within the gaming industry in Mississippi is employee relationships with management. One report showed that 75 % of employees within the industry left the organization as a direct result of a poor relationship with their supervisor (Joyce, 2006). This was identified as a factor within the questionnaire and had a direct correlation between the number of fire chiefs within the past five years and the number of respondents that indicated that employee/management relations were causing turnover within their department. The Cripple Creek Fire Department has had four fire chiefs over the past ten years, which would indicate some level of instability within the

organization. This would certainly be a contributing factor of the level of turnover within the department over the past ten years.

The overall employee turnover rate within the casino industry was as high as 70% to 80%. Effective leadership and relationships with supervisors are an integral role of retaining employees (Agrusa & Lema 2006, p.17).

Reviewing employee turnover within public safety agencies has many similarities with the private sector. The volunteer fire service is arguably one of the most difficult sectors within the fire service to retain staff members. A relationship between supervisor employee relationships was also identified in this sector as well. Carter 2005 found that leadership had a significant impact on membership retention within the volunteer fire service. The study found that volunteers left the organizations many times because of poor leadership from the fire chief. Overall, the article identified poor leadership as the overarching reason for members leaving the department (Carter, 2005). This is also an indication of some of the struggles the Cripple Creek Fire Department has had over the past ten years. The fire department is primarily a paid department; however, until recently it had a very small volunteer firefighter component. The paid firefighters were seeing significant turnover and the volunteer division was not successful. The volunteer division at one time was the majority of the staff for the fire department and over time had deteriorated to only a few members with very little support from the department. This could have been as a result of the turnover within the fire chiefs' positions and poor leadership. Further, this could have been a warning sign for the current turnover issues within the department that went unnoticed. When volunteers that are not compensated become disenfranchised with the agency, it should be viewed as a warning sign for potential problems that may be encountered with the paid staff. Overall, poor leadership was noted within the

literature review and the questionnaire and should be noted as a condition that contributed to turnover within the department.

Looking at turnover within a technical industry, the amount of turnover can be related to how the industry values the professionals. When industry experts publish how valued employees are within this field, it tends to increase turnover throughout the industry. These technical employees feel they are undervalued within their agency and look for an organization that will provide them with what they are told they are worth. Turnover rates within the Information Technology industry have been reported at 25 % to 35 % over the past five years. When the trade publications boast how valuable Information Technology professionals are, it seems to increase the desire of employees throughout the industry to leave their current employer (Moore & Burke, 2002, p. 73). This trend can certainly be a contributing factor within the fire service. For the past couple of years, the industry has been sending an underlying message that the economy is poor and that employees might be better suited to stay with their current employer. As the economy improves, this message may change to what the information technology sector feels effects turnover within their field. The new message within the fire service may be the economy is improving and you can stop settling for your current employer. This will have a significant impact on employee turnover within the fire service throughout the country. This should be a warning sign to fire service leaders that they need to look for opportunities to improve conditions within their department to change the mindset of valued employees.

Examining turnover within public safety communications identified several areas that can provide a more stable work environment and minimize employee turnover. Solie, 2003 describes avoidable turnover as directly related to actions the organization has control over. They contend the organization should focus on issues within their power to control. For instance, inconsistency

in teaching methods and overly high expectations are two of the most common pitfalls when looking at issues that frustrate employees within the organization. When employees feel valued and have good communications with management, it creates an environment conducive for employee retention (Solie, 2003, p. 12). This is certainly an area the Cripple Creek Fire Department can provide a more stable learning environment. This is clearly another area the high amount of turnover within the fire chief's position has created an environment conducive to high employee turnover. When a leader left the organization, the leader took all their vision and planning they envisioned with them. If the department had a good working environment, this "start and stop" method of organizational planning would certainly be enough to create enough instability to encourage employees to seek employment with another organization.

Many times an employer simply develops a reputation that it cannot overcome without strong stable leadership. If an employer is viewed as having high employee turnover, it could give the impression the company is a bad employer and keep quality employees from seeking employment with the company (Shahnawaz & Jafri, 2009, p. 159). This is certainly an area that has impacted the Cripple Creek Fire Department. The department has developed a reputation of being a stepping stone for employees that want to move to larger departments. This has created an environment where employees are almost expected to move on to another department. If they have not left after a few years, they may begin to look for other opportunities simply because that is what is expected within the organization. If they do not leave, they feel they are being viewed as an employee that has settled for a lesser organization. This behavior is very destructive to the organizations ability to keep good employees. Further, this behavior is very corrosive to the organizations ability to attract a quality fire chief.

Sometimes valuable employees simply leave the organization without rational reasoning. Ghiselli (1974) found that some employee's personality would lead to them changing jobs frequently. He stated this behavior didn't seem to come from logical thought, but simply an internal urge or impulse to change places. This provides some understanding of how some factors of employee retention are simply unpredictable and unavoidable. This would certainly be a factor to consider when examining employee turnover within the Cripple Creek Fire Department. The geographical location of the department could be contributing to the amount of turnover within the department. Cripple Creek is located high in the Rocky Mountains and not within close proximity to services typically located within a larger city. One example would be the lack of child care within the city. There is currently only one child care facility within the city which could prevent single parents the opportunity to build a life within the community. This is one example of the many services this small mountain community cannot offer an employee.

Recommendations

The recommendations from the data collected are based entirely from the questionnaire and the literature review. There was a significant disconnect revealed between the staff members and the fire chiefs. Although both sets of respondents indicated that only one employee left the organization every couple of years, there seemed to be a difference of opinion of why they left. The staff respondents indicated that 77.1 % of them went to another department to make more money, while only 37.5 % of the fire chief respondents felt this was the primary issue. The data would indicate the fire chief respondents placed a greater emphasis on other factors being the issue. A recommendation to complete exit interviews with employees to better understand why

they are leaving the organization would help the department better understand how to retain employees. The City of Cripple Creek completes exit interviews with exiting staff members; however, the leadership within the Cripple Creek Fire Department should take a more active role in understanding why the employee is leaving the organization. Currently, the Cripple Creek Fire Department relies solely on the exit interview from the human resources department. This could provide a gap in the effectiveness of the communications returning to the department.

Salary was further indicated when respondents were asked which one thing could be changed to reduce employee turnover within the department. The staff members indicated 62.5% would increase salary, while only 50% of fire chief respondents felt this would have the greatest impact. Even though there was a difference between the two respondents, they both indicated that salary was a leading factor for employee turnover within their department. A recommendation to complete a comprehensive salary survey would provide a framework to better understand if salary is actually a factor in turnover within the department. The survey should not only include agencies of similar size, it should include the leading competition for the agency for attracting employees. For example, the Cripple Creek Fire Department has only one additional paid department within the area to compare their salary; however, many employees leave for larger agencies. The City of Colorado Springs and the City of Pueblo are the two primary agencies the Cripple Creek Fire Department are competing with. These departments should be included within the salary survey to ensure competitive wages are in place and salary is not the primary reason for turnover within the department. The survey should also include a comparison of health care and other benefits the other departments are able to offer. The salary survey may indicate a higher wage when compared to the larger agencies; however, this increase in cost should be compared to the expense of continually hiring additional employees within the

fire department. This recommendation should also be undertaken within other fire departments struggling to retain quality employees. The questionnaire indicated that departments of similar size and complexity have staff members and fire chiefs that feel compensation is their number one issue when facing employee turnover within their department.

The questionnaire also indicated there may be a perception issue between how the fire chief feels and how the staff members feel within the department. When asked how the staff members felt their department compared to other departments of similar size in relation to employee turnover, there was a difference in how staff members and the chief viewed their department. The staff members indicated they perceived the department turnover to be greater than other departments, or about average. The fire chief respondents indicated by 62.5% they felt their department's turnover was lower than other departments their size. This would indicate there is a perception issue within the department that needs to be addressed. If the employees feel they have higher turnover than they actually do, it could lead to the department developing a reputation for being a stepping stone department. As discovered within the literature review, the department's reputation has a great impact on the organization's ability to attract quality employees. A recommendation to streamline communications within the department should be undertaken to improve the perception of turnover within the department. Providing a clear message from the administration, or the human resources department would give the employees the information they need to formulate an educated opinion about the level of turnover within their department. When employees have the proper information, they would be less inclined to listen to information that may be inaccurate and further damage the department's reputation. The level of rumor control and maintaining consistency in the information being distributed to employees will

help the department improve their reputation and increase their ability to attract and retain quality employees.

The questionnaire also indicated that leadership was a factor in employee turnover within their department. The fire chief respondents indicated 81.4% of their department had two or more fire chiefs within their department over the past ten years. The staff respondents indicated that leadership had some level of impact on employee turnover within their department 89.6% of the time. The literature review also supported leadership of the agency as a significant factor in reducing employee turnover. The chief of the department clearly has a significant impact on the level of turnover within the department. The departments within the questionnaire indicated a high level of turnover within the fire chief's position which could be a significant factor in solving the turnover issues within the Cripple Creek Fire Department. The Cripple Creek Fire Department has had four fire chiefs over the past ten years creating an environment that would increase turnover within the department. A recommendation to the municipality to implement a retention program directed at recruiting and retaining employees within the fire chief's position. More emphasis should be placed on retaining leadership within the department to maintain a level of continuity within the leadership. The literature review provided support of how important this position is within the department and how turnover within this position can lead to increased employee turnover. When leadership changes frequently, the planning for the department leaves with the outgoing fire chief. This constant interruption of strategic planning can leave the department stagnant and not moving in a positive forward direction. This will ultimately lead to frustration within the staff members of the department and increase employee turnover within the department. The effects on the department trickle down through the ranks. If the fire chief leaves the department, the organization incurs a high cost to replace the position, as

well as the cost related to employees leaving the department because of the lack of continuity within the leadership. A higher focus should be placed the retaining quality leadership within the department and creating stability within the strategic planning. Maintaining the fire chief's position with a quality leader could be the single greatest factor in reducing turnover within the department.

The questionnaire asked the fire chief respondents if their department had programs that focused on employee retention. The respondents indicated that 81.3% of their organizations did not have a program in place. Along with this question, the literature review indicated that even when employers have programs in place they were not being utilized. The direct and indirect costs of employee turnover compared to the funding allocated to a retention program could be substantial. A recommendation to initiate a study within the organization to create cost comparisons in relation to the level of turnover within the agency, the funding spent of replacing employees and the funding required to implement a retention program should be undertaken. The study should measure intangible loss such as the amount of experience lost when an employee leaves and how that financially impacts the department. Nearly all of the departments within the questionnaire indicated some level of elevated employee turnover within their department, whether within the staff ranks or the fire chief's position; therefore, there is a direct correlation between that and the lack of retention programs within the department. The City of Cripple Creek does not currently have a retention program in place and should evaluate a program within the city. A greater emphasis should be placed on retaining quality employees and not how to replace them when they leave.

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Appendix A

Questionnaire-Staff

Figure A1-Is your department classified as a fire district, municipal city or township?

Fire Chief Questionnaire- Question 1

Is your department classified as a fire district, or a municipal city, county or township?		
Answer Options	Response %	Response Count
Fire District	23.5%	4
Municipal city, county or township	76.5%	13
Other	0.0%	0
<i>answered question</i>		17
<i>skipped question</i>		0

Figure A2- How many full-time staff members do you have?

Fire Chief Questionnaire- Question 2

How many full-time staff members do you have?		
Answer Options	Response %	Response Count
1-10	0.0%	0
11-20	58.8%	10
21-30	23.5%	4
Greater than 31	17.6%	3
No full-time staff	0.0%	0
<i>answered question</i>		17
<i>skipped question</i>		0

Figure A3- How often do full-time employees leave your department?

Fire Chief Questionnaire- Question 3

How often do full-time employees leave your department?		
Answer Options	Response %	Response Count
1 per year on average	6.3%	1
1 every couple of years	43.8%	7
More than 1 per year	0.0%	0
1 about every 5 years on average	25.0%	4
Employees rarely leave the department until they retire	25.0%	4
	<i>answered question</i>	16
	<i>skipped question</i>	1

Figure A4- When employees leave your department, which statement(s) best describes why they left?

Fire Chief Questionnaire- Question 4

When employees leave, which statement(s) best describes why they left?		
Answer Options	Response %	Response Count
Left to make more money at another fire department	37.5%	6
Left for better benefits at another fire department	12.5%	2
Left the fire service all together	25.0%	4
Left for reasons not related to pay or benefits	18.8%	3
Left for a larger fire department because they wanted to "run more calls"	31.3%	5
	<i>answered question</i>	16
	<i>skipped question</i>	1

Figure A5- If you could increase only one of the following, which do you feel would have the greatest impact on employee retention within your department?

Fire Chief Questionnaire- Question 5

If you could increase only one of the following, which do you feel would have the greatest impact on employee retention within your department?		
Answer Options	Response %	Response Count
Salary	50.0%	8
Benefits	18.8%	3
Increase in staffing	31.3%	5
Better working conditions	0.0%	0
<i>answered question</i>		16
<i>skipped question</i>		1

Figure A6- For a department your size, do you feel the amount of employee turnover within your department is normal?

Fire Chief Questionnaire- Question 6

For a department your size, do you feel the amount of employee turnover within your department is normal?		
Answer Options	Response %	Response Count
I feel it's about the same as other departments our size	12.5%	2
I feel its greater than other departments our size	6.3%	1
I feel its about average	18.8%	3
I feel our turnover is lower than most departments our size	62.5%	10
<i>answered question</i>		16
<i>skipped question</i>		1

Figure A7- How many different fire chiefs has your department had within the past 10 years?

Fire Chief Questionnaire- Question 7

How many different fire chiefs has your department had within the past 10 years?		
Answer Options	Response %	Response Count
Only 1 fire chief	18.8%	3
2 fire chiefs	43.8%	7
3-4 fire chiefs	31.3%	5
More than 4 fire chiefs	6.3%	1
<i>answered question</i>		16
<i>skipped question</i>		1

Figure A8- Does your department have programs that specifically focus on employee retention?

Fire Chief Questionnaire- Question 8

Does your department have programs that specifically focus on employee retention?		
Answer Options	Response %	Response Count
Yes	18.8%	3
No	81.3%	13
Not sure	0.0%	0
<i>answered question</i>		16
<i>skipped question</i>		1

Figure A9- Please select the statement(s) that best describe your recruiting strategy.

Fire Chief Questionnaire- Question 9

Please select the statement(s) that best describe your recruiting strategy.		
Answer Options	Response %	Response Count
We conduct a nationwide search and the candidate with the best test score is selected	12.5%	2
There is no advantage based on geographic location or their status as volunteer, reserve or part-time member of the department	37.5%	6
We try to hire within our part-time, reserve or volunteers whenever possible	50.0%	8
We give preference points for candidates than live within the jurisdiction	6.3%	1
	<i>answered question</i>	16
	<i>skipped question</i>	1

Figure A10- Does your department have a policy requiring full-time employees to live within a certain distance of the department?

Fire Chief Questionnaire- Question 10

Does your department have a policy requiring full-time employees to live within a certain distance of the department?		
Answer Options	Response %	Response Count
Employees must live within the jurisdiction/coverage area	0.0%	0
Employees must live within a defined radius of the department	50.0%	8
Employees can live wherever they choose	50.0%	8
	<i>answered question</i>	16
	<i>skipped question</i>	1

Appendix B

Fire Department Staff Questionnaire

Figure B1- How often do full-time employees leave your department?

Staff Questionnaire- Question 1

How often do full-time employees leave your department?		
Answer Options	Response %	Response Count
1 per year on average	34.7%	17
1 every couple of years	36.7%	18
1 about every 5 years on average	16.3%	8
Employees rarely leave the department until they retire	12.2%	6
	<i>answered question</i>	49
	<i>skipped question</i>	1

Figure B2- When employees leave, which statement(s) best describes why they left the department?

Staff Questionnaire- Question 2

When employees leave, which statement(s) best describes why they left?		
Answer Options	Response %	Response Count
Left to make more money at another fire department	77.6%	38
Left for better benefits at another fire department	12.2%	6
Left the fire service all together	2.0%	1
Left for reasons not related to pay or benefits	18.4%	9
Left for a larger fire department because they wanted to "run more calls"	20.4%	10
	<i>answered question</i>	49
	<i>skipped question</i>	1

Figure B3- If you could increase only one of the following, which do you feel would have the greatest impact on employee retention within your department?

Staff Questionnaire- Question 3

If you could increase only one of the following, which do you feel would have the greatest impact on employee retention within your department?		
Answer Options	Response %	Response Count
Salary	61.2%	30
Benefits	16.3%	8
Increase in staffing	18.4%	9
Better working conditions	4.1%	2
<i>answered question</i>		49
<i>skipped question</i>		1

Figure B4- For a department your size; do you feel the amount of employee turnover within your department is normal?

Staff Questionnaire- Question 4

For a department your size, do you feel the amount of employee turnover within your department is normal?		
Answer Options	Response %	Response Count
I feel it's about the same as other departments our size	14.3%	7
I feel its greater than other departments our size	32.7%	16
I feel its about average	30.6%	15
I feel our turnover is lower than most departments our size	22.4%	11
<i>answered question</i>		49
<i>skipped question</i>		1

Figure B5- How big of an impact do you feel fire department leadership (i.e. fire chief, assistant/deputy chief) has on employee retention within any fire department?

Staff Questionnaire- Question 5

How big of an impact do you feel fire department leadership (i.e. fire chief, assistant/deputy chief) has on employee retention within any fire department?		
Answer Options	Response %	Response Count
Little or no impact on an employee's desire to leave the department	10.2%	5
I feel it's the single greatest factor that causes employees to leave any fire department	24.5%	12
I feel it has some impact; however, employees leave for other reasons	65.3%	32
	<i>answered question</i>	49
	<i>skipped question</i>	1

Figure B6- How big of an impact do you feel the governing board (i.e. city council, board of supervisors etc.) has on employee turnover within any fire department?

Staff Questionnaire- Question 6

How big of an impact do you feel the governing board (i.e. city council, board of supervisors etc.) has on employee retention within any fire department?		
Answer Options	Response %	Response Count
Little or no impact on an employee's desire to leave the department	18.4%	9
I feel it's the single greatest factor that causes employees to leave any fire department	12.2%	6
I feel it has some impact; however, employees leave for other reasons	67.3%	33
I feel the governing board does not play into why an employee leaves	2.0%	1
	<i>answered question</i>	49
	<i>skipped question</i>	1