

Effects of Career Advancement on Employee Retention and Recruitment

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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 use the language, ideas, expressions, or writings or another.

Signed: Mark Mc Kinney

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# EFFECTS OF CAREER ADVANCEMENT ON EMPLOYEE

## **Abstract**

The research problem was the Antigo Fire Department (AFD) did not know whether the lack of career advancements had an impact on employee retention and recruitment. Over the last 20 years 47 employees had left AFD, and those employees had up to 13 years of experience at the time of resignation. The constant training and rehiring of new employees had limited AFD from providing the fire and EMS that the citizens of the city of Antigo expect and demand.

The purpose of this research was to discover the impact that career advancement had on employee retention and recruitment. The research used surveys, questionnaires, and interviews to achieve its purpose. The procedures involved, surveying past AFD employees, current employees, and fire chiefs representing cities with similar demographics. The surveys were then compiled and compared.

Using the descriptive method the research paper answered three questions: what career advancement opportunities are available to fire departments with like size and demographics as the Antigo fire department, would having more career advancement opportunities have made a difference in the members that left the Antigo fire department within the last 15 years, and how does the availability of career advancement opportunities affect employee retention at the Antigo fire department?

The results indicated a correlation between the current state of career advancement opportunities and the inability of the Antigo fire department to recruit and retain employees. Both the current and past employees identified career advancement opportunities as a reason they left or considered leaving AFD. Recommendations include adding a captain or deputy chief tier between the company officer level and the fire chief, recommendations also includes creating a senior paramedic or engineer rank, limiting acting officers to 1 per shift, and providing transparent and well documented promotion requirements and procedures.

# EFFECTS OF CAREER ADVANCEMENT ON EMPLOYEE

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## **Introduction**

During the summer of 2014 an earthquake struck in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. This earthquake was strong enough to activate the tsunami warnings and initiate preparation by the coastal communities of the Pacific Ocean. Most fire service emergencies do not have hours of early warning to help mobilize our response, and to come to a solution. The city of Antigo fire Department is dealing with such an emergency. Through the inability to recruit and retain employees the fire departments average age is becoming more and more concentrated, and within 10 years may have an age concentration of 80% of the workforce having under 5 years of experience.

Recruitment and retention has been an important topic within the Antigo fire Department. Like many problems there are multiple facets that could be causing our recruitment and retention problem. This research is only covering effects of career advancement opportunities on the city of Antigo fire department's ability to recruit and retain employees.

The problem is the Antigo fire Department does not know whether the lack of career advancement has an impact on employee retention and recruitment. The purpose of this research is to discover the impact of career advancement on employee recruitment and retention. This research project will be utilizing descriptive research to accomplish the answering of the following research questions. What career advancement opportunities are available fire departments with the likes size and demographics as the Antigo fire Department? Would having more career advancement opportunities have made a difference in the members that left the Antigo fire Department within the last 15 years? How does the availability of career advancement opportunities affect employee retention at the Antigo fire Department?

To answer of these research questions this research paper will utilize interviews, a literature review, and survey results to contrast, compare and compile answers to help achieve the stated purpose, and help satisfy and answer the problem.

The researchers hypothesis is that the research will show that compared to other departments there is a lack of career advancement opportunities at the Antigo fire Department, and that lack of advancement opportunities factored in the decision for the candidates applying for the Antigo fire department to seek other employment at other departments, and that the lack of advancement opportunities is making current employees look for other career advancement opportunities in other departments.

### **Background and Significance**

The city of Antigo fire Department is located in north-central Wisconsin relatively isolated from the nearest career fire Department. The 3 nearest fire departments are the Merrill fire Department at a distance of 25 miles, the Wausau fire Department at a distance of 35 miles, and the Rhinelander fire Department at a distance of 55 miles. The city of Antigo operates one station staffed with 6 full-time staff per shift, with a total of 3 shifts with an administration staff of a public safety director, a Fire Chief, and an administrative assistant.

The city of Antigo fire Department provides critical care paramedic level interfacility and 911 transport service, full fire department services, tactical emergency medical services, technical rescue, and a complete and inclusive public education and fire inspection program.

To recruit employees the city of Antigo fire Department has utilized a myriad of different procedures to test employees for their ability to fulfill the role of a firefighter paramedic. The 1<sup>st</sup> iteration of the testing was a combination of a state fire exam, a physical agility test, and an interview with the command staff. The city of Antigo fire Department then transitioned to a

vetted department administered exam, a department proctored physical agility test, and an interview with the command staff. The final and current method that the city of Antigo fire Department utilizes for employee testing is a consortium-based testing accomplished by technical colleges located in separate regions of the state. Fox Valley technical college, which is based in Appleton Wisconsin, is 110 miles away from Antigo Wisconsin, or Chippewa Valley technical college, which is located 150 miles west of the city of Antigo.

The distance in which our recruits initially reply is partially a source of our recruitment and retention problems. Most employees that come to work for the city of Antigo fire Department are either from the Chippewa Valley area, or the Fox Valley. In a previous paper this researcher identified one of the major reasons the lack of employee retention was the individual employees drive to return back closer to the city that they grew up in (McKinney, 2012). Drawing people out of those 2 consortium pools make it difficult to retain employees, but other adjustments may be able to be made to increase the employees motivation to stay employed with the city of Antigo fire Department. To make the city of Antigo fire Department more desirable for employees to continue their employment, make the city of Antigo their home and the city of Antigo their permanent fire department, many things can be adjusted. The fire department can offer more pay, better benefits, and better vacations, but in hard financial times it is difficult to add additional cost on to the taxpayer. The other thing the city of Antigo fire Department could do to help retain employees is to implement more opportunities for career advancement.

At the city of Antigo fire Department there is a block of 7 employees that will be retiring within a two-year window. Currently, beyond that block of 7 employees there are 4 midrange employees that will retire in about 15 years. This leaves the 7 remaining employees having less



than 3 years of experience. The city of Antigo fire Department has also been experiencing rapid and frequent turnover. Roughly 75% of new employees leave within 2 years (McKinney, 2012). In the past 8 years there has not been one employee that has stayed past 5 years. If the current trend continues without repair there could be a major shift in the demographic of this department. When the older block of 7 employees retire, the city of Antigo fire Department could see a command staff of the 4 midrange employees, along with 14 firefighter paramedics under 3 years of experience. This would involve having one experienced fire officer operating with an entire crew of 6 with little to no experience.

The earthquake has occurred, and the tsunami warning has been issued. The city of Antigo fire Department can accurately predict this retention emergency years in advance, and hopefully early enough to avert this retention emergency. This research paper targets the problem that the Antigo fire Department does not know whether the lack of career advancement has an impact on employee recruitment and retention. This paper is linked to the 4<sup>th</sup> year executive officer program class: Executive Leadership. This research is linked because of the important change that has to occur not only to the values and beliefs of the employee, the value and beliefs of future employees, the management of the city of Antigo, and the city of Antigo fire Department.

Even though it would be easy to link any one of the 4 strategic goals of the United States Fire Administration, the one goal that stands out as more focused to this problem is goal number 4: advanced the professional development of fire service personnel and of other people engaged in fire prevention and control activities (United States Fire Administration [USFA], 2014, p. 1). The change in the way the city of Antigo fire Department deals with the importance of

recruitment and retention of employees will aid in the professional development of the personnel of the city of Antigo fire Department.

### **Literature Review**

This literature review will be a comprehensive look on all facets of the problem that is facing the city of Antigo fire Department with its recruitment and retention of current and future employees. In this literature review this research will cover the general duties of the city of Antigo fire Department staff, also the general duties usually applied according to rank across the fire service. This literature review will discuss causes and conditions that affect morale both positively and negatively, this research will also identify other company's solutions to retention and recruitment. This research through the literature review will also identify the effect of career advancement on job satisfaction, including companies that have enough perceived advancement opportunities, and companies that do not have enough perceived career advancement opportunities. This literature review will also examine the benefits and the distractions of multilevel management. A part of the recruitment and retention equation has to consider that the new generation of employee has little to no commitment to their current employer, and the literature review will examine this level of commitment and whether career advancement has any impact on the level of commitment that the current generation of employee made commit to. The final emphasis of this literature review will be identify what future employees look for in an employer that they choose to commit to.

### **Overall fire department structure**

The city of Antigo fire Department consists of 3 supervisory levels with a total of 5 available positions. On top of the organization is our city of Antigo police chief who acts as a public safety director and liaison to the city manager. Underneath the public safety director is

the fire chief. The fire chief is responsible for day-to-day operations of the fire Department and is also involved in the response plan and daily personnel. The fire chief is responsible for overall direction of the department and manages the financial aspects of the fire agency. Underneath the Fire Chief there are 3 fire lieutenants, each commanding their respective shift. Each Lieutenant has the responsibility to manage a major division of the fire Department. 1 Lieutenant is in charge of the emergency medical services, 1 Lieutenant is responsible for fire response and technical and tactical teams, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Lieutenant is responsible for fire prevention, fire education, and fire inspections. The remainders of the employees are line personnel with no responsibility for Department systems.

In 1999, the city of Antigo fire Department consisted of one Fire Chief, 3 captains, and 3 lieutenants. During the reorganization of 2000, the fire department eliminated the 3 captains, and created a deputy chiefs position to manage the major divisions of the fire service. During the budget crisis of 2010 the deputy chief resigned his position and city of Antigo fire department eliminated the deputy chief's position and shifted the divisional work to the lieutenant level. At this time the police chief was appointed public safety director, but provided mainly oversight and liaison responsibilities within the fire department.

Fire Department command levels vary drastically according to the size and scope of the department's community, but certain responsibilities can be drawn from the literature review. A large Department may include: a Fire Chief, and assistant chief, multiple deputy chiefs, multiple division chiefs, multiple Battalion Chiefs, multiple captains, and multiple lieutenants. This literature review will explore the responsibilities for each level. It is to be noted though; the rank structure is often determinant on Department size. A small department may not have the rank structure, or need the rank structure that a larger department would employ.

Generally, on the top of the fire organization is the fire chief. According to be international city/County management Association they describe the responsibilities of the fire chief as: planning, directing, and reviewing activities of personnel performing fire inspections, fire prevention, fire suppression, and emergency services (International City/County management Association [ICMA], 2009).

Underneath the fire Chief is an assistant chief. According to the Orange County fire Authority the assistant chief position is responsible for performing executive level command-and-control direction utilizing and deploying staffing during major emergencies disasters or extreme weather conditions. The assistant chief is also responsible for planning directing and organizing the functions of the operations Department (Orange County Fire Authority [OCFA], 2015). The assistant chief is also responsible for overall city management when the Fire Chief is unavailable.

Underneath the assistant chief is usually reserved for the multiple positions of the deputy chief. The deputy chief's main responsibility is the oversight of major divisions in the fire service such as operations. According to the Des Plaines, Illinois fire Department their deputy chief provides oversight to 3 division chiefs. The responsibility of the deputy fire chief of operations for the Des Plaines fire Department is to "supervise and coordinate the activities of the fire department and delivery of fire suppression, rescue, hazardous materials, and emerging medical service operations"(Des Plaines Fire, 2015, p. 1)

Assisting and collaborating underneath the guide of the deputy chief is the division chief. A division's chief's responsibility often is a subrogation of the overall responsibility of the deputy chief. A deputy chief of operations may have division chiefs working for them such as: a division chief of fire, or a division chief of emergency medical services. The town of Menasha

fire Department utilizes a division chief of training to administer and oversee all aspects of fire and EMS training within their Department. The town of Menasha fire Department states that “this position serves as 3<sup>rd</sup> in command of the fire Department operations and administration. The town of Menasha fire department continues to say: the primary focus on this position is training, leaving day-to-day management of the fire Department with the Fire Chief” (Town of Menasha fire Department [TMFD], 2005, p. 1).

A battalion chief’s responsibility is generally oversight and control over a prescribed group of stations. According to the international Association of fire Chiefs, the Battalion chief is the lowest chief officer in a fire departments rank structure. The Battalion chief is above the rank and file fire station members and fire company officers (International Association of fire Chiefs [IAFC], 2015). The Battalion chief is often in charge of day-to-day operations and may be in charge of a multi-station Battalion, or in charge of the entire department.

A fire captain is in charge of the fire station either on a single day basis, or on an everyday basis. The fire captain is responsible for the overall management of the fire station and the multiple fire companies that work in that particular fire station. In West Palm Beach Florida they indicate the responsibility of the captain is to supervise and direct the activities of one or more fire companies in the routine duties of the fire station ([WPBFD], 2014).

Generally the lowest officer in the fire service is the fire Lieutenant the fire Lieutenant is in charge of an individual company. A fire station may have multiple companies usually divided up with the available apparatus. At the city of Antigo fire Department we have 3 companies at our fire station. There is a fire engine company, a ladder company, and ambulance company. According to the international Association of firefighters lieutenant job function job analysis; the

function of a fire Lieutenant is to command a company and to provide duties of a firefighter in multiple emergency roles (International Association of firefighters [IAFF], 2015).

### **How career advancement effects retention**

Generation Y has been notorious on their lack of commitment to their current employers. Generation Y workers are fast movers they are not the type of employee like the baby boomers, or the World War II generation were. Those 2 generations were built with the understanding that hard work and commitment to the employer will breed success (Hobart, 2006). With the downsizing and rightsizing of corporations and some of the lack of employer commitment to the employee, generation Y have not experienced the commitment the baby boomers and the World War II generation experienced (Hobart, 2006). According to Forbes magazine generation Y will change jobs often, they will often change multiple careers, and they will do this often and throughout their lives (Gatton, 2013). A past employee of the city of Antigo fire Department left this Department to go to another Department, left that Department to go to another Department, and then left that Department to end up with the department that he is on currently. It has to be considered that even with an adjustment in the ability for employees to have career advancement that it may not completely solve the issue. The new generation doesn't just accept things the way their employers want them to accept, they are very fluid and are not afraid of change (Gatton, 2013).

Maslow's hierarchy of needs indicate several levels where employees can either grow or shrink in their personal and professional lives (Maslow, 1943). As employers understanding these hierarchies of needs can help us form the backbone of our recruitment and retention program. Maslow's hierarchy needs begins with the physiological needs of the employee, and then progresses on to the security needs of the employee (Maslow, 1943). After the

physiological and the security needs are fulfilled the organization can help fulfill the affiliation needs of the employee. The affiliation needs can be developed by creating team spirit facilitating outdoor social activities, and using periodic praise (Ramlaff, 2004).

After the need for affiliation is attained, the next level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs is the employees esteem. This esteem can be accomplished by giving employees praise and awards, delegating responsibilities to the employee, giving training to the employee, and encouraging participation. Affiliation is where career advancement aligns. An employee can gain social status and awards as they reach additional ranks in the fire Department and help the department retain these personnel by allowing them to reach self-actualization (Ramlaff, 2004).

In an article by Philip Perry titled "Holding Your Top for Talent" he states "that star performers are demanding and getting more opportunities for career advancement, greater participation in leading edge projects and entrepreneurial freedom." He continues to indicate that mere pay and bonuses may not be enough to hold employees in their current position (Perry, 2015)

### **Career advancements on recruitment**

Just like the lack of career advancement may force employees to look elsewhere for other jobs, another job in the same career field with better career advancement opportunities can aid that department's ability to recruit the employee. Employees are looking for more than just pay and benefits, they are looking for social status, and outside indicators that they are successful in their career (Ramlaff, 2004). Today's work environment retains their top employees by providing greater compensation, expanded responsibilities, and the ability for that employee to receive career advancement (Perry, 2015).

Whether it is a department's position that they offer enough promotional opportunities to have a positive effect on recruitment and retention may not be the salient point. The real proof is in the employees opinions. Affecting recruitment and retention has to begin with meeting the needs of the employee's comparative to outside agencies. If the employee's needs are met better in another agency that no matter what the opinion is of the fire administrator, the availability of career advancement in the current employees point of view will be hampered (Tessier & Pennington, 2014).

### **Job satisfaction and retention**

It is no secret that job satisfaction and retention of current employees are intertwined at every level of employment. Job satisfaction has many more facets than just career advancement alone, but when given an opportunity to improve job satisfaction by changing structure or values of the department, every effort should be made to do so. Many things go into creating positive job satisfaction including satisfying Maslow's hierarchy of needs. This research is specifying the correlation between job satisfaction, retention, and career advancement.

Interviewing a current employee about their prospects for career advancement and how it affects their morale resulted in an interesting comment by the employee. The employee had stated that in the current status of the city of Antigo fire departments promotional prospects that he expects to retire as a firefighter. This employee wants to be recognized for the work and the commitment he has for the fire Department, but due to the age of the fire officers and his age there will not be any opportunities for him to advance. He also continued to talk about the perception of a person who retires from a fire Department as "only" a firefighter. He has heard others mention outside the city of Antigo fire Department that a person who retires as a firefighter either is very committed to be only a firefighter, or for one reason or another was not



capable of performing their job well enough to warrant a promotion. This comment reaches back to Maslow's hierarchy of needs when it talks for the need of social status (Maslow, 1943). A department that has a lack of career advancement to the extent that good employees cannot receive any visible and tangible recognition limits the social status and the self-confidence that a promotion brings (Hedges, 2014).

**Benefits of multi-level management:**

There are many benefits of multilevel management. 1<sup>st</sup>, the division of labor that occurs when multiple people have responsibilities across the organization often leads to a more specialized and complete management of that employee's sphere of influence. The researcher is currently a fire Lieutenant that has the division level responsibility of leading the emergency medical services. The researcher is unable to give the time necessary either to be a great fire officer, or a great EMS service director. Using additional effort and using all the available time it is well enough that the researcher is adequate at both. Having more personnel officially responsible for management level tasks will aid in the production and the success that the program will experience. When the city of Antigo fire Department had a deputy chief that handled the major divisions of the fire Department, the fire officers were able to interact, train, and participate with their crew more than it is currently happening. Overloading your employees can end up with lower productivity, decreased quality, absenteeism and tardiness, negativity, and stress related health problems (Kelchner, 2014). All of these signs of overloading your employee can result in the lowering of morale and can lead to the employee looking to outside agencies for different employment.

In the fire service, emergencies can happen at any time of the day. In the city of Antigo there are two levels of management at the fire Department. There is the Fire Chief that works a

40 hour workweek Monday through Friday during the day, and 3 fire lieutenants who work on a California schedule. Each fire Lieutenant has roughly 16 days of vacation. Therefore conceivably, there could be up to 48 days where there is no official fire officer to respond to a major emergency in the city of Antigo. The citizens that are served by fire departments expect a person who is legally responsible, appointed by the city to manage and emergency when it occurs. It is conceivable that without a Lieutenant or Fire Chief available the finger-pointing to determine who was in charge could wind up traveling in a large circle. The inability to provide leadership 24 hours a day 365 days a year is unacceptable to taxpayers (FET, 2015)

### **Negatives of multi-level management**

A common saying in business is: too many chiefs and not enough Indians. This saying is indicating the problem with having a top-heavy organization where everyone is looking to manage workers and not enough workers to do the actual job. The ability for the fire administrator to create descriptive job descriptions and set responsibility and expectations can alleviate the problems with having too many chiefs and not enough workers.

The next negative of having at multilevel management organization is the cost involved with the identification of increase rank and responsibility. In the Antigo fire Department the command level rank was created at Lieutenant because it is the cheapest and lowest fire officer available. The researcher is quite aware that the naming of the fire officer as a lieutenant while giving the officer division chief level responsibilities is a cost saving measure. The fire administration has to realize that this cost-saving measure can end creating a culture where in the fire officers may look for organizations more in line with the employee's expectations. According to the center of American progress the Exodus seen by the current employees of the city of Antigo fire Department are costly. The cost of employee turnover for businesses is high,

regardless of the level of wages being paid to the departing or incoming employees” (Center for the American Progress [CfAP], 2012)

### **What does a prospective employee want in an organization?**

Employees of the future, including the current generation Y employee are looking for employees that meet their specific needs. When these needs are not met the generation Y employee is more than willing to move on to an employer that does meet the needs. According to the magazine Inc. there are 10 things employees want most. Employees want purpose, employees want goals, employees want responsibilities, employees want autonomy, employees want flexibility, employees want attention, employees want opportunities for innovation, and employees want open-mindedness (Lapowski, 2010).

If an employer cannot deliver these needs the employee will find a career in a business that will deliver (Lapowski, 2010). An employer has to understand that even if these needs are met early in the employee’s career it does not necessarily mean these needs will be met throughout this employee’s career. The goals and aspirations and the employees needs all evolve as the employee’s career continues. With personal experience the researcher has different aspirations than I did as a new recruit. The responsibilities and job duties has changed and so did the meaning of the needs of each employee.

The 1<sup>st</sup> three items that Lapowski indicates as employee needs are: purpose, goals, and responsibilities. Giving employees these 3 needs can help in higher morale and job satisfaction, but as Maslow said in his theory, there has to be some social status, or affiliation accompanying these goals to keep driving the employee forward in his career (Maslow, 1943).

Another need identified by Lapowski is the need for attention. Often promotions and career advancements fall into this realm of attention. By giving employees a reward for a job

well done that is visible for everyone to see helps fulfill this need of attention and helps keep individual morale and self-confidence high and will aid in the retention of the employee (Lapowski, 2010). Once there is an increase in self-confidence and individual morale the employees will aid in recruitment by discussing their personal happiness with their career and their employer.

In summary, the literature review helped bolster the hypothesis of the researcher while the information gathered helped target interview questions and develop survey questions that help flesh out the important issues that the research paper needed to address. The literature review by helping adjust the procedures and instruments for data gathering helped to influence the project.

### **Procedures**

This applied research project utilized a descriptive research method for gathering the appropriate information on the specific opinions on 3 different subsets of population. This research method was then correlated to compare and contrast the opinions of each subset. This descriptive methodology focused on research to explore the effect on the availability and structure of promotional ability and career advancement ability on the city of Antigo fire Department's ability to retain and recruit personnel.

The 1<sup>st</sup> part of this research project began with an organization of the background and significance of the recruitment and retention problem as it concerns the city of Antigo, Wisconsin. This background and significance also identified the link to the National Fire Academy course: executive leadership. The background and significance also identified the link to the United States fire administration's 5 strategic goals.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> part of this research project incorporated a review of existing research and literature on the subject. The reviewed materials consisted of a selection of journal articles, periodicals, Internet resources, textbooks, and nonfiction books. Literature resources work was conducted at the Antigo public library, utilizing the Internet, the National Fire Academy's Resource Center and the University of Oshkosh's Polk library. The researcher used the catalog at both libraries and searched by typing "recruitment", "retention", "career advancement", "fire department structure" and "resignations". The researcher also used several combinations of these to locate journal articles and references for this applied research project.

An extensive search for information related to the subject was conducted on the Internet. Multiple search engines were utilized such as Yahoo and Google. Google scholar was also utilized to ascertain peer-reviewed research papers. These articles were very beneficial in researching the employee's expectations, and the effect of career advancement opportunities on the retention and recruitment fire department personnel. The research articles also provided insight for the other reasons it is difficult for the city of Antigo fire Department to retain and recruit fire department personnel. To accomplish the literature review the researcher looked at both fire service related peer-reviewed documents and also non-fire service related peer-reviewed documents. The researcher felt that a good mix between both fire service and non-fire service documents would provide the breadth necessary to fully describe the reasons why the city of Antigo fire department current career advancement ability affects the retaining and recruiting of new employees.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> section of this applied research project explores the effect on recruitment and retention that the city of Antigo fire departments current rank structure has by surveying 3 individual target groups. The 1<sup>st</sup> survey group was employees that have resigned from the city of

Antigo fire department while excluding those who retired from the city of Antigo fire department. I chose to exclude personnel that have left prior to 15 years ago; this decision was made due to the change in rank structure that occurred in the year 2000. The next target group was the current employees of the city of Antigo fire department. The researcher wanted to explore the effects of career advancement opportunities in the Antigo fire department on the employee's morale and whether they intend to remain with the city of Antigo fire department. The last target group was fire administrators. The fire administrators were tasked with providing information on their overall department organization, and the results of exit interviews. This research wanted to delve into whether past employees and other departments indicated a lack of promotional abilities in the reason why they chose jobs elsewhere. Also, accomplished by the city survey was to identify whether the fire administrator believes that their rank structure provides enough career advancement to retain and recruit adequate numbers of personnel.

The survey was generated using survey monkey.com and the researcher utilized the gold package to allow greater flexibility in the creation and disbursement of the survey. There were 3 individual surveys created for each one of the subsets.

The 1<sup>st</sup> survey was generated for employees that have resigned from the city of Antigo fire Department in the last 15 years. The survey focused on the reasons why the employee left the city of Antigo fire Department, if it involved better career advancement opportunities in their new job, or a lack of career advancement opportunities at the Antigo fire Department.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> survey was generated for current Antigo fire Department employees. This survey focused on the morale of the current employee and whether the available career advancement opportunities affected their options to resign from the city of Antigo fire Department or to be employed with a fire department that has more career advancement opportunity.

The final survey was generated for fire administration and fire department heads. The survey went out to fire administrators throughout the state of Wisconsin to gauge three individual items. The 1<sup>st</sup> item was the municipality's overall rank structure. The 2<sup>nd</sup> item was the fire administrator's view on the available career advancement opportunities in their department. The 3<sup>rd</sup> item was the results of the fire administrators exit interviews with resigning employees and whether those employees indicated either positively or negatively the effect of their department's career advancement opportunities on their choice to resign.

Participation in the research was voluntary. The past city of Antigo fire department employee's survey was disseminated through direct email. The expected sample size was 20 participants; but the actual size was 13 respondents. The current fire Department employee survey was disseminated through email and personal request. The sample size was expected to be 10 participants; the actual size was 8 respondents. The fire administrator survey was disseminated through email and personal request by the researcher. The expected sample size was 10 participants; the actual number of respondents was 6.

The limitation of the research project was the same limitation that is seen with most survey related research. It is hard for the researcher to confirm whether there is an adequate cross-section in any one of the survey groups to truly gauge the expectations and the willingness to provide career advancement effects on morale and recruitment and retention. Also, delivering the survey on an email type platform may result in multiple server responses from single people. The next limitation is the inability for the researcher to clarify survey answers once the survey has begun. This is an online survey with limited ability to clarify questions for survey participants.

A limitation of this research was the voluntary nature of the survey. Also, an internet based survey will often reduce the amount of older participants.

### **Results**

The questions for this research project were created for to answer three questions that apply to the Antigo fire department and their knowledge of the effect of the career advancement opportunities present in the Antigo fire department and how that current status of career advancements effects the department either positively or negatively. The first of the three questions that were used to develop the three surveys is: what career advancement opportunities are available to fire departments would like size and demographics as the Antigo fire Department? The 2<sup>nd</sup> question is: would have more career advancement opportunities have made a difference in the members that left the Antigo fire Department within the last 15 years? The final question is how does the availability of career advancement opportunities effect employee retention at the Antigo fire Department.

Before the surveys were compiled and analyzed the hypothesis by the researcher was threefold. 1<sup>st</sup>, the researchers hypothesis was that like size and demographically similar departments had more career advancement opportunities, and that other departments had less turnover that employees identified lack of promotional ability as they major reason for their resignation. The 2<sup>nd</sup> hypothesis was that the career advancement opportunities at the Antigo fire Department was not the main reason that firefighters resigned and took other jobs, but it still was a major factor in the amount of turnover seen at the Antigo fire department. The final hypothesis is that current employees are dissatisfied with the available career advancement opportunities at the Antigo fire department and that it has made members of the fire department look elsewhere for jobs.



The 1<sup>st</sup> question tried to establish a baseline for what is normal in comparable size and demographic fire departments in the state of Wisconsin. This question was meant as a comparison to the Antigo fire department staffing level and whether an identifiable difference can be extrapolated from the data analyzed from the survey results.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> question delved into the reasons why past employees of the Antigo fire Department decided to resign and move on to competing fire agencies. The Antigo fire Department has seen a large amount of turnover in the past 15 years. Most turnover can be identified as firefighters returning to their hometown area, but this survey and research questions task is to identify career advancement causation that may be present in the high rate of turnover.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> question enters into the mindset of the current Antigo firefighter and tries to identify the opinions regarding adequate officer levels, appropriate supervisory responsibilities, and whether the current structure of the Antigo fire department has any effect on their morale and or willingness to look for jobs elsewhere.

For the reference of surveys the survey answering question number 1 will be referred to as the city survey, the survey that answers question number 2 will be referred to as past employee survey and the survey that answered question number 3 will be referred to as current employee survey.

#### **Question number 1:**

**What career advancement opportunities are available to fire departments would like size and demographics as the Antigo fire Department?**

When developing this survey the researcher identified fire departments that were in a geographic region and also fire departments that were like size and served like populations. Out of the total of 13 requested departments 6 responded to the survey. Each department was given 3

notifications of the survey. After the 3<sup>rd</sup> notification, it was assumed by the researcher that the department did not want to take part in the survey.

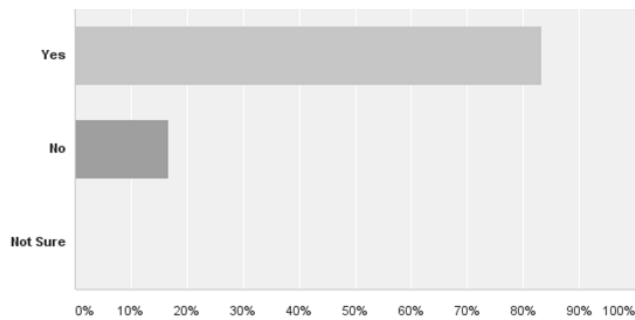
The 1<sup>st</sup> question on the city survey was to determine the fire departments classification for employment status. 65% of the respondents said they were mostly full-time, and 35% of the respondents said they were a combination fire Department, in comparison the city of Antigo is a mostly full-time fire Department. The 2<sup>nd</sup> question on the city survey requested information about basic services provided by the surveyed fire departments. Each department stated that they provided fire protection, education, emergency medical services, and 80% provided special rescue services. The Antigo fire Department provides all four services.

The next question on the city survey asked the responding fire departments how many full-time employees currently work for their organization. 2 departments responded 11 to 20, 2 departments' responded 20 to 30 and 2 departments responded: more than 50 employees. The city of Antigo employees: 33 firefighters, paramedics, and EMTs.

All the responding fire departments identified a chief level officer between the fire chief and the shift officer. These command level chief officers were identified either as: assistant chief, deputy chief, division chief, or Battalion chief. The Antigo fire Department does not have any chief officer between the fire chief and the company officer. 4 of the 6 respondents answered that their department employs lieutenants, but no department identified captains as a rank.

After the demographics were identified the city survey continued on to the next section of the questionnaire. The next section of the questionnaire starts to identify the apparent of facts of the promotion system and the available career advancements in the surveyed departments. This survey starts to identify if the idea of career advancement retention problems are apparent to the

leaders of the organizations. The 1<sup>st</sup> question identified in the 2<sup>nd</sup> section of the city survey asks the respondent whether their employees are given exit interviews when they retire or resign.



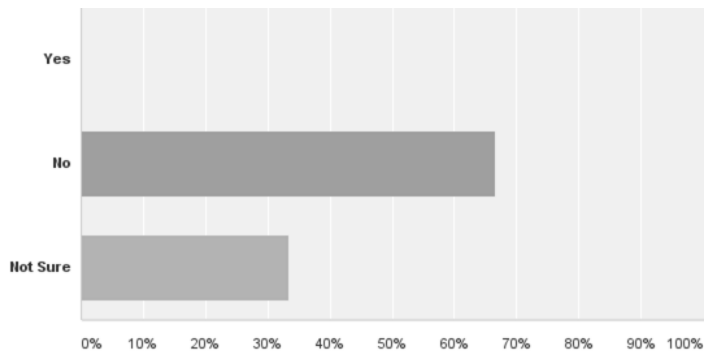
**Table 1 – Exit Interviews**

Exit interviews are often provided for employees and employers to identify root problems and causes on why the employee is either retiring or resigning. This exit interview often gives the employee a good opportunity to offer honest critique that can

help the fire Department learn to identify its weaknesses and grow as a Department. As shown in Table 1 - 83% of the responders identified that yes; their department does provide exit interviews for resigning employees. One respondent identified that their department did not provide exit interviews for resigning or retiring personnel.

The next question tries to identify whether the current fire Department surveyed believes that they have too many officer levels to support their agencies goals and projects. This question returned a unanimous survey result that identified that no department taking part of the survey believes that they have too many officer levels. When speaking with officials from the Antigo fire department, the officials also believe that they have the appropriate level of officer levels to satisfy the citizen's needs and the goals of the fire department. To the heart of the matter the next survey question asks whether the current availability of promotions and career advancement opportunities helps their department retain employees. No Department answered that there available promotional opportunities and career advancement opportunities help retain employees that resign or retire from the fire Department. As shown in Table 2 - 66% of the responders indicated that they are available promotions do not help retain employees, while 33% indicated

that they were not sure whether the available promotions aided in retention. The next question on the city survey follows the same logic from the previous question. This question tries to allow the department to identify whether their structure and career advancement opportunities makes recruiting new employees easier.



**Table 2 - Promotions helping retention**

15% of the fire Departments said their promotional opportunities and career advancement opportunities aids in the recruitment of new employees. 85% of the respondents identified the answer of no to whether their departments available promotions help retain employees.

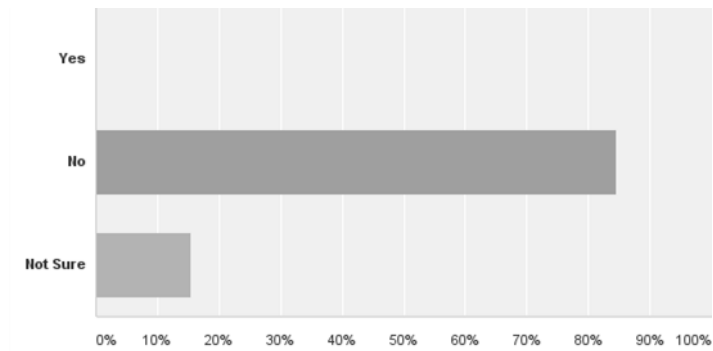
### **Question number 2:**

**Would having more career advancement opportunities have made a difference in the members that left the Antigo fire Department within the last 15 years?**

As stated earlier in the background and significant section the city of Antigo fire department has seen an exceedingly high rate of resignations. The city of Antigo fire department also has experienced difficulty in recruiting new employees. The purpose of the past employees survey is to identify concerns not made public during exit interviews. Also, the survey allows the researcher to question past employees after they have introspect and had time to think about why they resigned from the city of Antigo fire department.

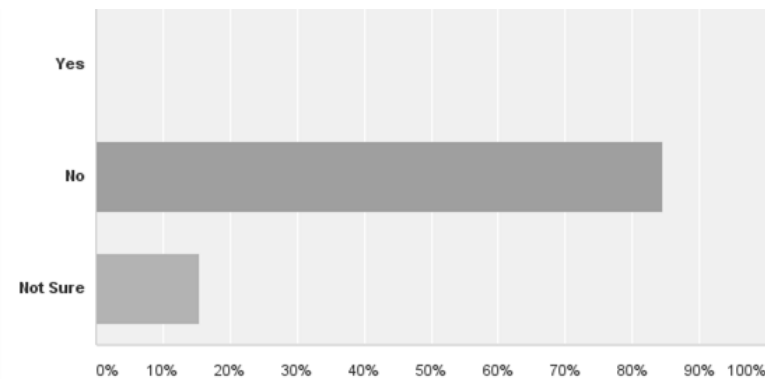
The survey presented to the past employees of the city of Antigo fire Department wastes very little time getting into the essence of the discussion. The 1<sup>st</sup> question asks whether they

believe that the city of Antigo fire Department has too many officer levels. As shown in Table 3 - of the 13 respondents 85% indicated that the Antigo fire Department does not have too many officer levels while 15% indicated that they were not sure if the Antigo fire Department to many officer levels.



**Table 3 - Too many officers?**

The survey of the past employees continues to ask whether they feel if the Antigo fire departments available promotions help retain employees. As shown in Table 4 - responding in almost the exact same manner as the previous question 85% of the respondents stated that the current available promotions do not help retain employees. To respondents indicated they were

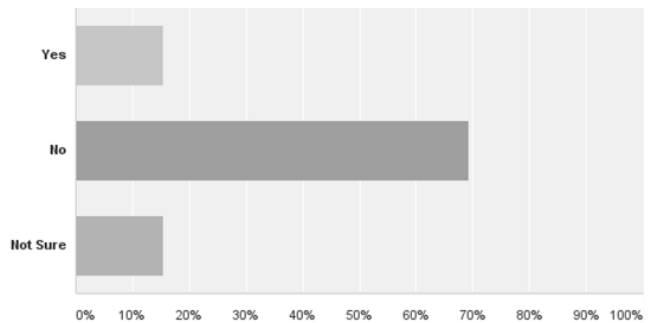


**Table 4 - Promotions and retention**

not sure if the available promotions help retain employees. On the same note the same employees were asked whether the Antigo fire department available promotions made it difficult for the Antigo fire department to recruit new

employees. For this question 38% said yes, the available promotions make it difficult to recruit new employees, 23% said that it did not have any effect on recruitment, and 38% were unsure of the effect on the Antigo fire departments available promotions on the ability to recruit new employees.

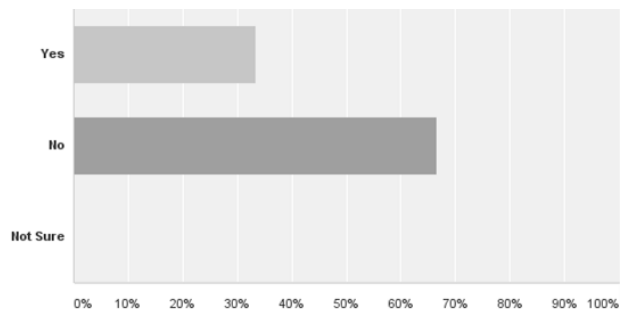
Reality versus perception is an important differentiation. The next question asked if the past employees feel there is enough room for advancement in the Antigo fire Department. As shown in Table 5 - 15% of the respondents said yes there was enough room for advancement, 15% indicated they were unsure whether there



**Table 5 - Enough advancement**

was enough advancement in the Antigo fire Department, but 70% indicated there was not enough room for advancement in the Antigo fire Department.

When asked if the availability of career advancement opportunities made you consider



**Table 6 - Reason to leave**

leaving the Antigo fire Department Table 7 shows that 33% of the respondents said yes, while 66% of the respondents said that the availability of advancement did not make them consider leaving the Antigo fire Department. In comparison to their current employer, the

question was asked whether the field their new employer has better opportunities for career advancement, 85% of the respondents identified that; yes, their new employer has better advancement opportunities than the Antigo fire Department did. One responder said no and one responder said they weren't sure. Table 6 illustrates this question.

When asked how many levels of supervision under the Fire Chief was appropriate for a fire Department of a like size of the Antigo fire Department there were 4 options given. The 1<sup>st</sup>

option was having a single

Lieutenant (8%) ; the next option

was having to levels which included

a captain and a Lieutenant (24%),

The 3<sup>rd</sup> option was 3 levels: a

deputy chief, a captain, and a

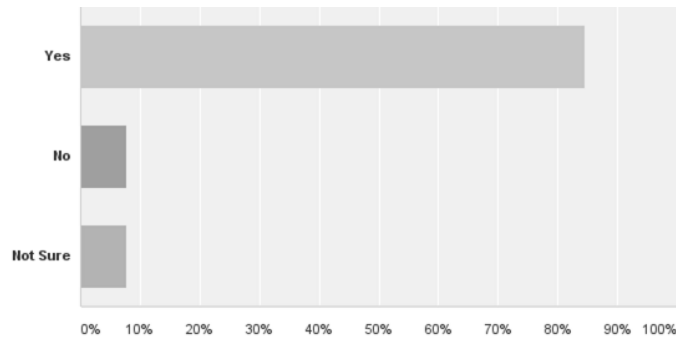
lieutenant (62%), and the 4<sup>th</sup> option provided and other category (8%). When given an

opportunity to expound in the other category, the one respondent indicated there was a greater

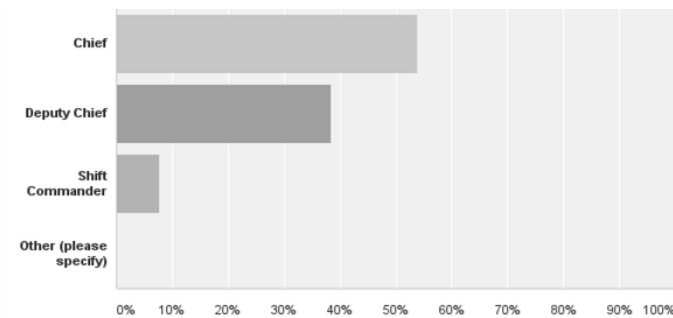
need for additional staffing then there was a concern about command levels in the fire

Department.

**Table 7 - Promotions at new job**



The next section of the survey dealt with the past employees opinion on normal fire command operations and the appropriate rank of officer per job task. The 1<sup>st</sup> question asked in



**Table 8 - Overseeing major divisions**

the past employee survey for this section was: who should be responsible to oversee major divisions in the fire Department. The options were: the Fire Chief, the deputy chief, or a shift commander. As shown on

Table 8 - 54% of the responders said the

Fire Chief should oversee the major divisions in a department with the like size of the Antigo fire

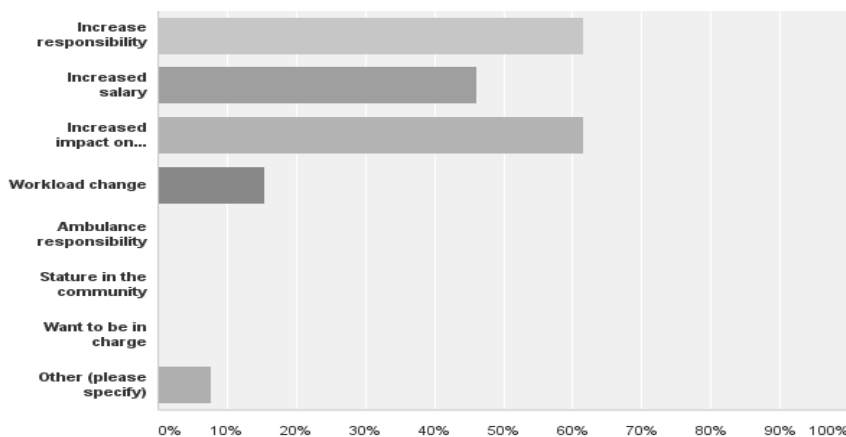
Department. 38% said a deputy chief should oversee the major divisions, while 8% identified

the shift commander as the appropriate level to administer fire Department major divisions.

When asked what fire Department rank should oversee day-to-day shift operations the past employee respondents were given 3 choices again, chief, deputy chief, and shift commander. This question identified 23% of the responders indicated that the deputy chief should oversee day-to-day shift operations, while 77% indicated they shift commander should oversee day-to-day shift operations. When asked who should be in charge in lieu of the shift commander 75% of the respondents stated that the Lieutenant should be 2<sup>nd</sup> in charge to oversee day-to-day shift operations underneath a shift commander. 25% of the respondents stated that an acting officer should be in charge of the shift while the shift commander is unavailable.

The city of Antigo fire Department has a policy where there is only one acting lieutenant on each shift. Even if there are many qualified individuals on that current shift there is only one available acting officer to act as 2<sup>nd</sup> in charge when the shift commander is absent. The next question on the past employee survey is whether the past employees believe that limiting the acting officer to one person per shift is appropriate. 46% of the respondents said yes limiting the acting officer position to one person is appropriate while 23% said no and 31% said they were not sure whether the acting officer position should be limited to a single person.

Often the motivations are unclear why people seek promotions. This survey gave a



unique opportunity to the researcher to explore the reasons why relatively young firefighters identify as the reasons why people seek promotion, whether it is themselves or others in power.

**Table 9 - Past employee, reasons for promotion**



This survey question was a chance for the past employee to select more than one answer. As shown on Table 9 - 61% of the respondents stated they would enjoy the added responsibility that a promotion would entail. 61% stated the reason they would seek a promotion is to have an increase impact on the Department, 46% identified an increase in salary, 15% identified a workload change, and 15% identified the reason to seek promotion is just a natural career progression.

Following on the same concept of the last question the past employee respondents were asked what is the main reason promotions are important to them. 61% of the respondents stated that the importance of promotions is to show a value to the organization. 8% said to show accomplishment to coworkers, while 2% stated to achieve a better salary. In addition to the normal questions, the survey respondents' added comments in the "other" category, the additional comment added was "a chance to prove yourself and to provide a change of pace, while the other respondent wanted to better themselves".

The last question in the past employee survey wanted to identify what the past employee felt as their prospects for promotion if they remain employed at the city of Antigo fire Department. As shown in Table 10 - 15% of the respondents stated that it would be an absolute

	<b>Absolutely</b>	<b>Very Likely</b>	<b>Likely</b>	<b>Not Likely</b>	<b>Not possible</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Weighted Average</b>
Score	<b>15.38%</b> 2	<b>7.69%</b> 1	<b>46.15%</b> 6	<b>30.77%</b> 4	<b>0.00%</b> 0	13	2.92

**Table 10 - Likely to be promoted**

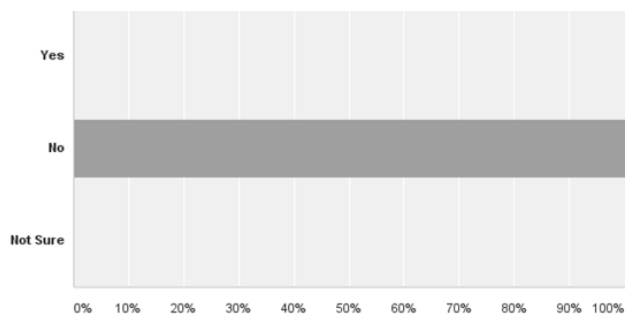
possibility that they would be promoted while at the city of Antigo fire Department. 7% stated that it was very likely. 46% said it was likely. 31% said it was not likely that they would be promoted and no one said it was not possible to achieve a promotion.

**Question number 3:****How does the availability of career advancement opportunities affect employee retention at the Antigo fire Department?**

A department that has a recruitment and retention problems has to do everything in its control to ensure that the employees that are committed to the organization are content with their choice and feel that their commitment to the organization will bear fruit. The 3<sup>rd</sup> question is accomplished by the 3<sup>rd</sup> survey which is referred as the current employee survey. This survey tries to identify the mindset and the beliefs of the current city of Antigo fire department personnel to help identify their level of belief in the career advancement system, and whether the current status of career advancement has any impact on whether they have decided to stay at the Antigo fire department or seek employment elsewhere.

15 members of the city of Antigo fire department were requested to take part in the survey. Of those 15, 8 members decided to take part in the survey. To restate the current chain of command for the city of Antigo fire Department, the head of the organization is a director of public safety whom oversees the police department and the fire Department. Underneath the public safety director in the police department is a police captain. Underneath the police captain is one patrol Lieutenant, several sergeants, and corporals. On the fire department side, the fire chief serves underneath the public safety director, and then below the fire chief there are 3 shifts lieutenants.

The 1<sup>st</sup> question asked the fire Department personnel is their opinion on whether the fire chief and lieutenant command structure results in too much of a

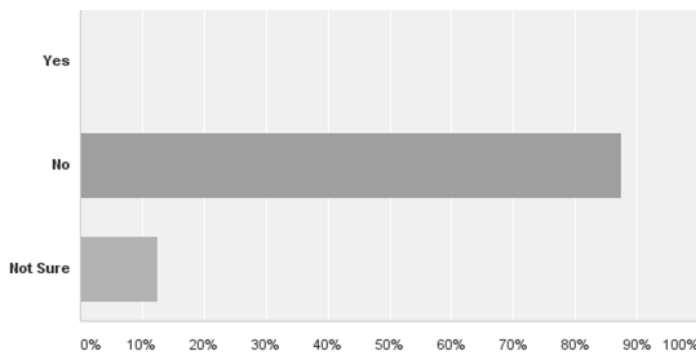


**Table 11- Enough officers**

top loaded Department, and whether they feel the Antigo fire Department has too many officer levels. As shown in Table 11 - 100% of the respondents stated that there are not too many officer levels in the city of Antigo fire Department.

The next 2 questions deal with the effect of the current organizational structure on recruitment and retention of employees.

The next question asks whether the available promotional ability present with the Antigo



fire Department helps the fire Department retain current employees. This question asked the current employees of the city of Antigo fire Department was whether they feel the available promotional abilities helped the Antigo fire Department retain

**Table 13 - Current employees and retention**

its employees. According to Table 13 -

88% of the respondents said the available promotional ability does not help the Antigo fire

Department retain employees while 12%

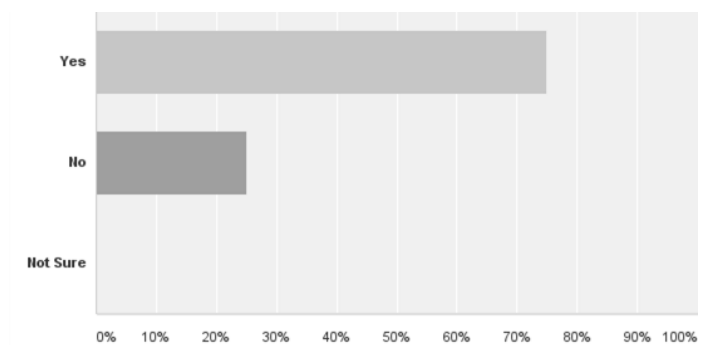
said they were not sure whether the

available promotions aided in the

retention of employees. Next question

asked whether the current employees

feel the available promotional ability



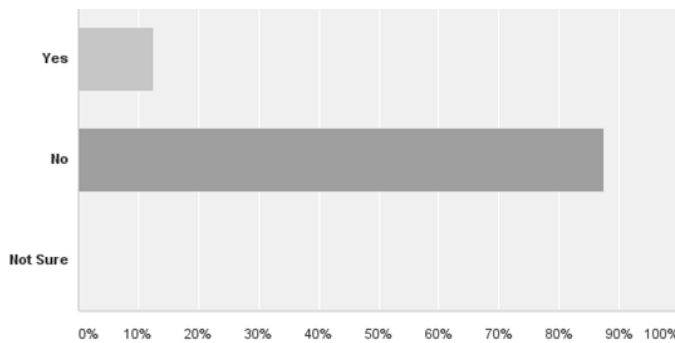
**Table 12 - Promotions and recruitment**

makes it difficult for the Antigo fire Department to recruit employees. As seen in Table 12 - 75%

said yes, and 25% said no that the available promotions make it difficult for the Antigo fire

Department to recruit new employees.

When asked whether there is enough room for advancement in the Antigo fire



Department for themselves and others 88%

said there was not, while one respondent said

there was (Table 14). The next question

asked whether the availability of

advancement made the current employee

consider leaving the Antigo fire Department.

**Table 14 - Current employees chance at promotion**

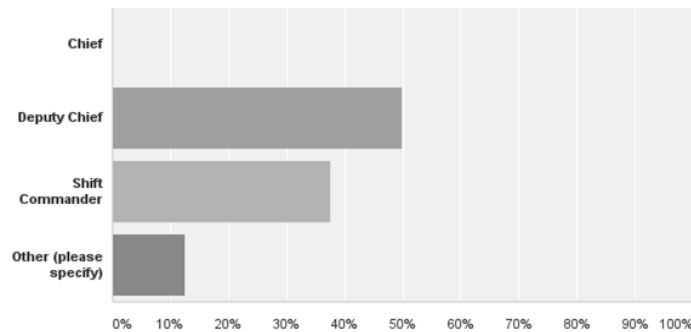
63% of the respondents said yes they have considered leaving the fire department because of lack of promotional abilities, to respondents said they were not sure, and one respondent said no they did not consider leaving the Antigo fire department.

When asked how many levels of command should be present in the city of Antigo fire department the respondents were given the same three choices the past employee survey provided during that questionnaire. The options were: 1 Lieutenant, two officer levels including Lieutenant and Capt., three officer levels that include lieutenant, captain, and deputy chief, and two that identified and other responses. The 1<sup>st</sup> other response included captain, lieutenant, and a training officer. The 2<sup>nd</sup> other response included a captain, lieutenant, and senior paramedic.

One complaint that has generated some consternation is the lack of clarity as it pertains to the promotional process. This is another opportunity for the researcher to utilize this survey tool to ask questions to help gauge morale. When asked whether the current employees feel that the promotional process is well described 75% of the respondents said no, while 12% either said yes or they were not sure.

For the next section of the survey dealt with the current employee's opinion on normal fire command operations and the appropriate rank of officer per job task. The next question

asked in the past employee survey for this section was: who should be responsible to oversee major divisions in the fire Department. The options were the Fire Chief, the deputy chief, or a



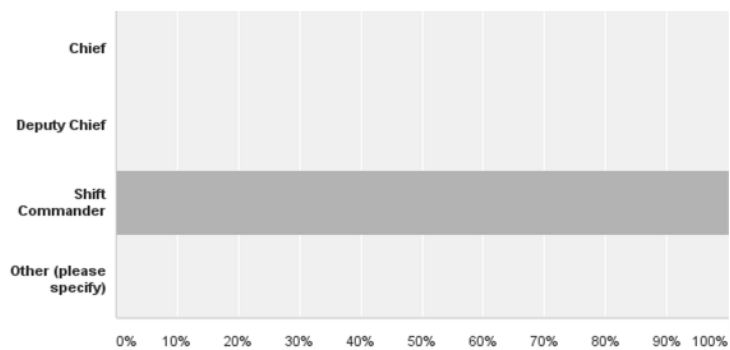
**Table 15 - Current employees' opinion on division management**

shift commander. As seen on Table 15 - 50% of the responders said the deputy fire chief should oversee the major divisions in a department with the like size of the Antigo fire department. 38% said a shift commander should oversee

the major divisions, while 8% identified the captain rank as the appropriate level to administer fire department major divisions.

When asked what fire Department rank should oversee day-to-day shift operations the respondents were given 3 choices: chief, deputy chief, and shift commander. As shown in Table 16 - This question identified 100%

of the responders indicated that the shift commander should oversee day-to-day shift operations. When asked who should be in charge in



**Table 16 - Day to day operations**

lieu of the shift commander 63% of the respondents stated that the lieutenant should be 2<sup>nd</sup> in charge to oversee day-to-day shift operations underneath a shift commander. 38% of the respondents stated that an acting officer should be in charge of the shift while the shift commander is unavailable.

The city of Antigo fire Department has a policy where there is only one acting lieutenant on each shift. Even if there are many qualified individuals on that current shift there is only one

available acting officer to act as 2<sup>nd</sup> in charge when the shift commander is absent. The next question on the current employee survey is whether the current employees believe that limiting the acting officer to one person per shift is appropriate. 50% of the respondents said yes limiting the acting officer position to one person is appropriate while 25% said no, and 25% said they were not sure whether the acting officer position should be limited to a single person.

Often the motivations are unclear why people seek promotions. This survey gave a

Answer Choices	Responses
Increase responsibility	50.00% 4
Increased salary	25.00% 2
Increased impact on change	62.50% 5
Workload change	0.00% 0
Ambulance responsibility	12.50% 1
Stature in the community	0.00% 0
Want to be in charge	12.50% 1
Other (please specify)	0.00% 0
<b>Total Respondents: 8</b>	

**Table 17 - Current employee motivations**

unique opportunity to the researcher to explore the reasons why relatively young firefighters identify as the reasons why people seek promotion, whether it is themselves or others in

power. This survey question gave the ability for the past employee to select more than one answer. According to Table 17 - 50% of the respondents stated they would enjoy the added responsibility that a promotion would entail. 63% stated the reason they would seek a promotion is to have an increase impact on the Department, 25% identified an increase in salary, 15% identified wanting to be in charge, and 15% identified the reason to seek promotion is a reduction in ambulance responsibility.

Following on the same concept of the last question the respondents were asked what is the main reason promotions are important to those who responded. Shown in Table 18 - 38% of the respondents stated that the importance of promotions is to show a value to the organization, and 13% said to show accomplishment to coworkers. In addition to the normal questions the

survey respondents were able to add comments in the other category. The 4 respondents that added their own

comments in the other

response area included

the comments: to

improve the

Department to its

greatest potential, to make a greater difference based off my opinions and motivation, to build a higher standard of care, and to show improvement within the department as well as increased financial opportunities.

Answer Choices	Responses	
To show value to the organization	37.50%	3
To show accomplishment to coworkers	12.50%	1
To show accomplishment to peer outside the organization	0.00%	0
To show accomplishment to the public	0.00%	0
Achieve a better salary	0.00%	0
Other (please specify)	50.00%	4
<b>Total</b>		<b>8</b>

**Table 18 - Why seek promotions**

## Discussion

As supported in the literature review, and confirmed in the research conducted for this applied research project the availability of career advancement opportunities and promotional abilities has an impact on the ability for a fire Department to recruit new employees and assist in retaining current employees. The research also identified the opinions of both the employees and of fire Department management.

The 3 groups picked for the survey categories were done to allow 3 unique views to the problem that the Antigo fire Department has in retaining and recruiting employees. One of the most important steps in problem identification is to step back and try and understand different perceptions from the stakeholders of the problem. In this case the real stakeholders are the employees currently working at the Antigo fire department and the command staff of the Antigo fire Department. Since a survey with such a narrow scope such as the employees of the fire Department and the command staff of the fire Department may be too narrow and not gain any

insight into the problem. To correct the problem this researcher added the past employees of the Antigo fire department in the belief that the past employee could provide insight from the outside, with little repercussion or benefit for themselves. Often it is quite predictable on how both sides of the recruitment and retention dilemma may equate the role of career advancement, but with the addition of the past employee the data can be compiled and contrasted to extract a truer picture of the results of the surveys.

In the discussion of question number 1 the data indicated that the majority of fire departments that are of equal size or in a similar geographical area have additional staff between the fire chief and the shift officer. A department that is 50 miles to the north of Antigo has a command structure of a fire chief, and assistant chief, 3 deputy chiefs, and 3 shifts lieutenants. This Department is comparable in size, city population, and responsibility to the city of Antigo fire Department (Rhineland Fire [RFD], 2015).

Exit interviews have often been a critical final effort to allow city officials to gain valuable insight on the organization from employees that are leaving for other careers (Malone, 2014). An effective exit interview allows a much more candid exchange of information than may be available while the employee is still employed. During employment, the employee may feel intimidated or fear reprisal from giving honest and candid feedback. During the exit interview the employee generally has obtained a new job and is secure in their resignation. This new relationship between the employee or and the employee can be fruitful. In this case the researcher attempted to re-create this exit interview by utilizing a questionnaire to allow past employees to give input during the survey.

Even more important than the exit interview, this survey allows even a greater freedom for past employee to be open and honest in their answers. Most individuals have already passed



their probation in their new employment and the fear of any sort of reprisal is limited. Also, the benefit of reaching out to these employees is amplified because of the outside view of the past employee and the benefit of understanding multiple organizations and their cultures.

One of the 1<sup>st</sup> surprises given during the survey results was the results of the question that has to do with consistent complaints about the lack of promotional opportunities during the exit interviews. The researcher hypothesized that there would be little admittance that exit interviews included any notion of a need for more promotional opportunities to help increase recruitment and retention. The results of 33% from the reporting agencies stating that they have had consistent complaints about promotional opportunities indicate enough of a significant number that it should be considered an important point. Even though 66% of the respondents stated that they did not hear consistent complaints, the 33% is higher than the researcher expected to see in the survey results.

When the current employees of the city of Antigo fire Department were asked whether they believe the Antigo fire department has too many officer level the result was unanimous, all the respondents believe that there should be additional command levels in between the lieutenant and the fire chief. In 2010, when the fire Department lost its deputy chief and the city decided not to fill that position most of the responsibilities vacated by the resignation were accepted onto the fire lieutenants job duties. The major divisions of the fire department which include fire, EMS, and public education were divided among the fire lieutenants. When asked about the proper command level for these major divisions the current employees of the city of Antigo fire Department indicated that the deputy fire chief should be in charge of the major divisions. This could be accomplished either by one single deputy chief, or 3 shift deputy chiefs.

When asked about oversight of the day-to-day operations of the fire department both the current city employees and the past employees showed almost a unanimous indication through their responses that the shift commander should provide oversight. Correlating this idea with the recommended staffing levels it indicates a captain should be providing day-to-day oversight of the shift. According to the West Palm Beach fire Department's captain's job description, the captain is responsible for managing the duty crew staffed at a single station (WPBFD, 2014). The city of Antigo has one station and according to West Palm Beach should be staffed with a station captain.

As expected the respondents in the city survey were 100% unanimous in their agreement that their fire departments did not have too many officer levels. One of the mistakes of the survey creation was not asking the appropriate follow-up question. A good follow-up question such as: do you feel your fire Department has too little officer levels might have generated a clearer answer than asking if the department had too many officer levels. Asking a department if they have too many officer levels often indicate admittance of improper management from above. Asking a department if they have too little officer levels may indicate a need.

As we start talking about whether promotional opportunities helps retain employees it was quite obvious from the city survey that the majority of fire Department Chiefs understood that their departments promotional availability does not aid in the retention of employees. Almost 66% of the survey respondents indicated a possible correlation between promotional availability and the inability to retain employees. The current employee survey also indicated a strong correlation in the belief that the city of Antigo's promotional abilities hinder the fire departments ability to retain employees. Almost 87% of the respondents indicated that the current promotional availability hinders retention of employees.

As we look at the next section of the recruitment and retention problem the next question is almost identical to the previous, but is looking at recruitment instead of retaining employees has a slightly different result. Most fire Chiefs indicate that the availability of promotional activity has little to no impact on the recruitment of new employees, in fact 85% state that promotions have no impact on recruitment. In contrast to the city survey, the current employee survey indicates an opposite opinion about the effects of recruitment of new employees from the current state of career advancement opportunities in the Antigo fire department. The researcher has to admit that the answer given during the survey by the current employees may indicate a bigger problem with retention of newly hired employees and not necessarily recruitment of new employees. The city of Antigo fire department has been long recognized by newly graduated paramedics and firefighters as a stepping stone department utilized to gain experience to help gain entrance into a department that is either closer to their hometown, or in a more prestigious city. Reducing this view of the city of Antigo being a stepping stone Department can be provided by giving the employee better career development and better career advancement opportunities (Coworx, 2015). Part of the discussion needs to identify the fact that the lack of promotions may not have any issue with recruitment of new employees, but a greater importance to retain current employees (Ramlaff, 2004).

When asked about the available career advancement opportunities in the city of Antigo fire department the current employees showed a strong tendency towards identifying the current career advancement as a problem to be dealt with. Almost 90% of the respondents feel that there is not enough room for advancement at the city of Antigo fire department. This significantly large number indicates a concern with future growth. This concern can often impact retention of employees due to low morale caused by the city's inability to publicly reward excellent work

(Coworx, 2015). Conversely, when the past city employees were polled about comparing the promotional abilities of their current jobs with the promotional abilities of the Antigo fire department 85% of the respondents indicated that their current job has a better opportunity for advancement. There has to be a correlation between past employees talking about career advancement opportunities from where they are at right now, and where they were at in the past and that comparison impacting the recruitment abilities at the Antigo fire department. Hearing that department A has better career advancement than department B will cause employees to often lean towards the department with better career advancement when given the choice (Coworx, 2015).

A low morale can often impact both the retention of long-term employees, and the retention of newer employees. A significant amount of employees leave before the 1<sup>st</sup> 90 days on the job are over (Coworx, 2015). When the current employees were asked if they've ever considered leaving the Antigo fire Department over half have stated yes, and more importantly only 15% said they have not considered leaving the department. Often leaving a job that's geographically isolated can cause family and personal upheaval and will often reduce the actual amount of loss of employees.

Before 1999 the city of Antigo fire Department had a fire chief, a deputy chief, two captains, and three lieutenants. A restructure done in 1999 reduced that staffing level to a fire chief, a deputy chief, and three lieutenants. This staffing stayed the same until 2010 with the resignation of the current deputy chief. The resignation of the deputy chief caused an elimination of the position and a reduction in the officer staff to one fire chief and three lieutenants. The police chief was named the director of public safety and provides oversight to the fire department. The survey of both the current city employees, and the past Antigo fire

department employees both indicate at least a 2 tier system underneath the fire department with both surveys indicating a captain, lieutenant shift system.

Another question that the researcher wanted to answer is the opinion of both the current city employees and the past city employees on the person responsible to fill in as the shift supervisor when the lead shift commander is either out on vacation, sick leave, or comp time. A slight majority of current employees stated that the lieutenant should be the rank of the person who succeeds the overall shift commander on their absence. It does have to be noted though there is a significant amount of respondents that indicate an acting officer should fill in the role of the shift commander. When the past city employees were polled a much greater result was shown from the survey results. 75% of the respondents stated that lieutenants should be 2<sup>nd</sup> in command, while 25% of the respondents said an acting officer should be in command. In both occasions the majority of respondents indicated the fire Lieutenant should be 2<sup>nd</sup> in command when the shift commander is absent.

The hypothesis developed by the researcher about the results whether the acting officer should be limited to one per shift was proven to be incorrect by both the past employees and the current employees of the city of Antigo fire Department. The hypothesis was proposed that there would be an indication that more than one person should be able to act in an officer capability on each shift, but both surveys indicated a majority of respondents preferred having the acting officer be limited to one per shift.

Given the chance to explore the motivations behind the reasons why people seek promotions and why career advancement helps build morale can be identified by the reasons employees seek promotions (Perry, 2015). Both the city employee surveys and the past employee surveys indicate that an increase in responsibility, and an increased impact on fire

department improvement are the highest ranked reason why people seek promotions. The employees that has resigned from the city of Antigo fire Department has also indicated a strong need for increased salary for promotional reasons, but the current city employees list increased salary less the amount of times indicated by increased responsibility and increased impact on the organization (Lapowski, 2010).

### **Recommendations**

The research in this applied research project has clearly demonstrated the need for the city of Antigo to improve their recruitment of new employees and retention of current employees. The hemorrhaging of employee's resignations has had a profound impact on the operational success, employee morale, and financial management of the city of Antigo fire department. There are many reasons in addition to the current state of promotional ability and career advancement that the Antigo fire department has developed recruitment and retention issues, but this research and this applied research project is targeted towards the impact of the adequacy or inadequacy of career advancement opportunities and how those impact the city of Antigo fire departments abilities to retain employees that already working for us, and increasing the amount of good candidates that apply for open positions when applications become available.

The data and the surveys indicate a strong correlation that the career advancement opportunities in the Antigo fire Department creates a damaged morale, and a damaged reputation throughout the state. When given a choice between 2 departments, new employees often select the other Department. To help curtail the loss of current and future employees and in order to correct these conditions affecting recruitment and retention the following recommendations are provided:

1. Create an in additional staff layer between the fire Lieutenant and the fire chief. This staff layer could be either a unionized captain, or a non-union deputy chief. The captain's position would be more in line with the overall shift and emergency management responsibilities indicated by the general job duties of the current shift commander. The deputy chief option is more in line with management of the major divisions within the fire service i.e. fire, EMS, public education.

2. In the shift commander's absence a Lieutenant position should be created or the current Lieutenant position be reworked to incorporate the new duties of a person who works under the purview of a shift commander.
3. Acting officers, if utilized should be limited to one personnel per shift. The acting officer could be either 2<sup>nd</sup> in command behind the shift commander, or 3<sup>rd</sup> in command behind the shift commander, and the lieutenant.
4. Investigate creating a senior paramedic, or engineer rank to allow smaller increments of promotions to increase the availability of positive recognition and indicate an increase in responsibility.
5. Develop a clear promotional process that indicates the job duties, prerequisites, and required experience to ensure a completely transparent promotional process.



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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Fire Administrator Survey

National Fire Academy Career advancement survey.

1. What is the name of your fire department?
2. What is the population of the municipality that your department serves?
3. Is your fire department classified as?

Mostly Full Time  
Combination  
Mostly paid per call  
Other (please specify)

4. Do you provide?

Fire Protection  
Education\Inspections  
Emergency Medical Services  
Special Rescue

5. Roughly how many full-time employees currently work for your organization?

1-10  
11-20  
20-30  
30-40  
40-50  
50+

6. Enter your rank structure from top to bottom.

Chief  
Assistant Chief  
Deputy Chief  
Division Chief  
Battalion Chief  
Captain  
Lieutenant

Acting Officers  
Firefighter (Per Shift)  
Non-firefighter EMTs (Per Shift)  
Any other Command staff?

7. Does your department provide exit interviews for resigning employees?

Yes    No    Not Sure

8. Have you had consistent complaints about the lack of promotional opportunities?

Yes    No    Not Sure

9. What rank commands the individual duty shifts?

10. What rank commands the individual stations? (can be the same as #9)

11. What rank administers the major divisions? (EMS, Fire, etc...)

12. Do you feel your fire department has too many officer levels?

Yes    No    Not Sure

13. Do you feel that your departments available promotions help retain employees?

Yes    No    Not Sure

14. Do you feel your departments available promotions make it difficult to recruit employees?

Yes    No    Not Sure

Done

## **Appendix 2: Past Employee Survey**

7. Do you feel your new employer has better opportunity for advancement?

Yes    No    Not Sure

8. How many Command levels under the Fire Chief are appropriate for the Antigo Fire Department?

- 1 (Lieutenant)
- 2 (Lieutenant, Captain)
- 3 (Lieutenant, Captain, Deputy Chief)

Other (please specify)

9. Do you feel that the promotional process is well described?

Yes    No    Not Sure

10. Who should oversee major divisions in the fire department (EMS, Fire, and Public Service?)

Chief  
Deputy Chief  
Shift Commander  
Other (please specify)

11. Who should oversee day to day shift operations?

Chief  
Deputy Chief  
Shift Commander  
Other (please specify)

12. Who should be second in charge during the individual shifts?

Lieutenant  
Acting Officer  
Firefighter

13. Should positions of acting officer be limited to 1 per shift?

Yes    No    Not Sure

14. What is the top reason to seek a promotion?

Increase responsibility  
Increased salary  
Increased impact on change  
Workload change  
Ambulance responsibility  
Stature in the community  
Want to be in charge  
Other (please specify)

15. What is the main reason promotions are important to you?

To show value to the organization

To show accomplishment to coworkers

To show accomplishment to peer outside the organization

To show accomplishment to the public

Achieve a better salary

Other (please specify)

16. Rate the possibility of never being promoted if you stayed with the Antigo fire department.

Absolutely    Very Likely    Likely    Not Likely    Not possible

Score

Score Absolutely

Score Very Likely

Score Likely

Score Not Likely

Score Not possible

Done

**Appendix 3: Current employee survey**

1. Do you feel the Antigo fire department has too many officer levels?

Yes    No    Not Sure

2. Do you feel your available promotional ability helps the Antigo Fire department retain employees?

Yes    No    Not Sure

3. Do you feel the available promotional ability makes it difficult for the Antigo Fire department to recruit employees?

Yes    No    Not Sure

4. Do you feel there is enough room for advancement in the Antigo fire department?

Yes    No    Not Sure

5. Did the availability of advancement make you consider leaving the Antigo Fire Department?

Yes    No    Not Sure

6. How many Command levels under the Fire Chief are appropriate for the Antigo Fire Department?

1 (Lieutenant)

2 (Lieutenant, Captain)

3 (Lieutenant, Captain, Deputy Chief)

Other (please specify)

7. Do you feel that the promotional process is well described?

Yes    No    Not Sure

8. Who should oversee major divisions in the fire department (EMS, Fire, and Public Service?)

Chief

Deputy Chief

Shift Commander

Other (please specify)

9. Who should oversee day to day shift operations?



Chief  
Deputy Chief  
Shift Commander  
Other (please specify)

10. Who should be second in charge during the individual shifts?

Lieutenant  
Acting Officer  
Firefighter

11. Should positions of acting officer be limited to 1 per shift?

Yes    No    Not Sure

12. What is the top reason to seek a promotion?

Increase responsibility  
Increased salary  
Increased impact on change  
Workload change  
Ambulance responsibility  
Stature in the community  
Want to be in charge  
Other (please specify)

13. What is the main reason promotions are important to you?

To show value to the organization  
To show accomplishment to coworkers  
To show accomplishment to peer outside the organization  
To show accomplishment to the public  
Achieve a better salary  
Other (please specify)

Done