Preparing to Lead; Fire Fighter to Company Level Fire Officer

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A research project submitted to the Ohio Fire Executive Program

31 May, 2011

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CERTIFICATION STATEMENT

I hereby certify that the following statements are true:

1.   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.

2.   I have affirmed the use of proper spelling and grammar in this document by using the spell and grammar check functions of a word processing software program and correcting the errors as suggested by the program.

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ABSTRACT

The Problem was the Miami Township division of fire/EMS (MTDF) did not have a way to prepare its fire fighters to become company officers. The purpose of this applied research project (ARP) was to identify and describe components of a fire officer program as it relates to candidate preparation.

The descriptive research method was used to answer the following questions:

1.   Are there suggested criteria that should be used to identify future fire officers?

2.   What are the skills and abilities needed for success as a fire officer?

3.   What practices in fire officer development planning are currently being utilized?

The author's research procedures involved relevant literature review of many sources and a survey tool. The survey tool consisted of 12 questions and was administered via electronic format to a grouping of 283 fire service professionals throughout the Southwestern Ohio region and beyond. The results of this research paper confirmed that preparation of personnel for the positions of leadership should be a priority to assist in establishing a better organization. It is recommended that MTDF further research the idea of a thorough candidate training and evaluation program through additional survey instruments and literature review with a focus on communications training as a priority. Following the additional research MTDF should then adopt the program as soon as possible.

INTRODUCTION

<u>Statement of the Problem</u>

The preparation of our personnel for the positions of leadership in the fire service and in other fields has become a top priority and will be for several years with the current rate of retirement, economical issues, and simply the lack of properly trained individuals to take over the leadership roles (Botts, 2008, p. 7). Today's fire service is under severe strain as time ticks away faster and faster. The level of experience that walks the bay floors these days is regressing due largely through attrition. This is not a unique situation to the fire service but one that is becoming apparent in all professional fields from physicians to librarians. As General Colin Powell once said, "Ultimately, it is people- not plan, systems, structures, or budgets- who make the difference between organizational success and organizational failure." (Harari, 2002, p. 24)

The current requirements to test from fire fighter to company officer at Miami Township Division of Fire/EMS (MTDF) are as follows; the candidate must have three years of career experience with the department, have met or will meet the Fire Officer II criteria before the end of their probationary period and possess or have a Associates Degree in Fire Protection or other approved degree within two years. Having met those criteria the individual would then be put through a written exam, assessment center, oral interview panel and finally an oral interview with the fire department executive staff.

The process itself is not the problem; the problem is the lack of a fire fighter development program prior to the promotion process. Officer development and preparation have not been a priority at the department. Personnel are taking leadership positions and not performing at the level that is expected of an officer for many months following promotion. This has exposed significant problems that affect the organization at all levels but most importantly at the company

level. The company officer has the responsibility to handle administrative, tactical and personnel issues on a daily basis. If the officer does not have the proper skill set it will have a ripple effect throughout in a short amount of time. Without a proper company officer development plan the new officers are limited to whatever knowledge, skills and abilities they bring with them and the organization will then have to retrain the officer to meet its needs.

The problem this study will address is the fact that (MTDF) has issues with its newly appointed company officers being unable to perform the specific job performance requirements of tactical operations, business, communication, and personnel issues at an acceptable level for many months following promotion.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this applied research project (ARP) is to identify and describe components of a company officer development program as it relates to candidate selection and candidate preparation that will create a successful officer development plan for the organization.

Once completed, the results of this research will be delivered to the MTDF executive staff for evaluation and assistance in a decision making process to implement a solid leadership development plan for the future company officer rank.

Research Questions

The following questions will be answered by this descriptive research method:

1.   Are there suggested criteria that should be used to identify future fire officers?

2.   What are the skills and abilities needed for success as a fire officer?

3.   What practices in fire officer development planning are currently being utilized?

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

Miami Township Division of Fire/EMS is a combination fire department that provides emergency medical services (EMS), fire suppression as well as technical rescue to the residents and visitors to Miami Township in Montgomery County, Ohio. The Township is served by four fire houses located throughout the community to provide efficient response times. Three of the stations are manned 24 hours. The City of Miamisburg is located within the boundaries of Miami Township. The unincorporated portion of the township contains approximately 21 square miles. It is located approximately 11 miles from downtown Dayton, Ohio. The Township includes 27,000 residents and a daytime population, based on employment in the area, of approximately 60,000. The primary source of income is property taxes, and a fire levy supports the operation of the Fire Department.

Currently, the MTDF has 32 full time career staff. Of those, 29 are bargaining unit members with six company level officers being included in the bargaining unit. One of the six company level officers is a fire bureau position and does not serve on the line in a supervisory capacity. At the time of this research project, the department is short three company officer and two executive officer positions. Of the company officers remaining, two currently have less than five years until they retire.

Being a combination department it also employs paid part time staff. The numbers of part time personnel vary greatly from month to month due to a high attrition rate attributed to many reasons. On average, the part time staff is maintained at eight per platoon or roughly 24 total part time personnel. The department also utilizes two administrative staff to perform daily business functions. The staffing of MTDF mirrors that of many local area departments.

Over the past several years the ability of the newly appointed company officer to

acclimate to the position has proven to be very challenging. The position of company officer at the Miami Township division of Fire/EMS requires the individuals to be acute at many vastly different skill sets. In preparing personnel for these positions, MTDF has done little in house organizational officer development building or planning and thus the individuals use whatever knowledge, skills and abilities (KSA's) they have picked up over the course of their careers. These KSA's may or may not reflect the vision of the organization. This leads to issues in ability to command a emergency scene effectively, difficulty in preparation of reports and billing information, being unable to deal appropriately with personnel issues and other mission critical components that need attention when the individuals step up to this new position. These critical issues along with the positional openings mentioned above make this a significant time in the history of the Miami Township Division of Fire/EMS. The potential impact this study could have on MTDF is the possible establishment and development of a solid officer development plan that will reduce the lag time from fire fighter to company officer setting the guidelines that can be carried on into the years to come.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review for use in the production of this ARP was gathered from many sources. Among them were journals, articles, books, research reports and extensive internet library searches that encompassed over 80 college library resources. The idea was to compile the information and opinions to develop a plan to better prepare personnel for the leadership position of company officer.

In the researching of the idea of an officer development program it is very interesting to find just how apparent the problem is. The lack of planning and training for leadership positions is a topic that covers professions from big business to librarians to physicians and continues. The

importance of good leadership is discussed by Locke (1991) and he suggests that there is little evidence that any organization lacking a strong leader will fail but, over the course of "recorded history" it has been very evident that to deal with and succeed in the issues of our human existence leadership must be present.

When looking at what tools will be necessary to leadership planning, groups or organizations need to supply the "pipeline" with good solid talent. "Depth and quality of an organization's leadership are the most important determinants of the organizations future" Hazarika (2009). The Army Leadership manual (AR 600-100) suggests that with an established record of over two hundred and thirty years of looking at leadership development this branch of the military has built the current program in use on the premise "it requires lifelong learning and identifies three developmental domains that shape critical learning experiences: operational, institutional, and self-development". The Army then uses each of the "domains" as the foundation to continually re evaluate and gather input to ready the future leaders of this branch of the military service.

In her article Kincaid (2010) mentions that in developing future leaders for business there are "seven steps to successful succession" identify your promising personnel, have a plan in place and all personnel are aware of it, create the areas that the personnel can find experience and test themselves, bring the key players in and allow them to help in planning the future of the organization, do not be an over the shoulder mentor and allow the personnel to grow and learn, the organization must be open minded and willing to believe in the new personnel to accomplish the new positions, the organization must continue to work better its abilities to handle its personnel as this will be a continual process(p. 56).

Kleinsorge (2010) suggests a new way to think about personnel preparation and organization building. He presents that there are three areas of planning that should be addressed. The first being "knowledge management, the second, leadership development and the third, performance support synergistically to identify, develop, and transition employees to their new roles". He goes on to discuss some of the areas that will need attention in this new way of looking at today's rapidly changing world of business. The first he looks at is identifying potential leaders then start training them in the ways of the organization and what the expectations are. During this also allow input and have an information exchange available for the potential leaders so they will have more understanding and feel as though they have a voice. The next area that he sees as important is to establish a training program that incorporates all employees and give the benefit of training all for the next position above their current placement. This training should be thought provoking and interesting and contain the organizations thoughts and visions for the future. The organization should provide this training on a continual basis and make it easily assessable. Finally he alludes to having the ability to put the personnel into the positions faster by incorporating the exiting leader in interviews for information sharing. This would be very important to make the transition work more smoothly and if documented, could be passed on to the next leader down the road (p. 67-69).

In the field of higher education, Barden (2010) discusses the importance of the colleges and universities getting on board with planning for the leadership vacancies. He mentions "three central components of an institutional succession plan as being professional development then leadership transition and finally making sure the new leaders get off to a good start". He goes on to say that "two decades ago, no meaningful strategic planning was done in higher education; now it is part of the accreditation process".

In the fire service today one of the most recognized road maps to what could be called leadership planning is found in the *Officer Development Handbook*. In it the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) state "Professional development is the planned, progressive life long process of education, training, self development and experience" (p. 1). They go on to mention four elements that each level of certification is developed around. The four factors are "education, training, experience, self development" (p. 4). The IAFC sites the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1021 *Standard for Fire Officer Professional Qualifications* in the IAFC manual as recognized minimum qualifications for every officer at every level from entry level officer to the fire executive.

Locke (1991) discusses a "leadership model" that gives recommendations of character traits that have been found to be good to evaluate the potential of an individual for a role as a leader. These characteristics range from being motivated, proactive rather than reactive, having honesty and integrity, up to being flexible and thought provoking. The model consists of many pieces but one the author mentions suggests that effective leaders will demonstrate tools and skills that non-leaders will not (6.)

In the book *The Future of Leadership* several leadership thinkers were brought together to try and crystal ball what will be needed to become a strong leader in the times ahead. They state that "leadership must come alive throughout the organization, not just at the executive levels". In addition, leaders will need to inspire others to act and be involved. They will need to accept failures as learning experiences and move forward. Leaders will need to be quick thinkers and be able to adapt to change rather than fight against it. They will need to attack the scary issues and realize they cannot make everyone happy (p. 246-247).

With 25 years of experience in researching the leadership idea Kouzes and Posner (2007) discuss in their book *Leadership Challenges* the "five practices of exemplary leadership". These five practices have been the common bond that they found through thousands of surveys and questionnaires and had given those leaders the ability to make strong progress in individual organizations. These authors make a case for these practices being able to be learned and taught so that the leaders can grow and become better, that they are not blessed with the "leadership gene" (p. 23-24). Inside the five practices they have "ten leadership Commitments" (p.25) that are used to help in learning to lead by giving some guidance in how to attain each of the five practices.

Lombardo and Eichinger (2007) take it a notch higher in their book *The Leadership Machine* in what they refer to the "People ROI" or the return on investment major companies have received by developing their people. They asked the questions like: " …do the top performers manage their talent and develop them? And does this contribute to how and why they are top performers?" The answers were all affirmative (p.167). These top companies had up to "twelve times the productivity of the average performers". In the study "the general rule of thumb of this kind of research is that the top performers outperform the average by 40 to 50 percent" (p.167). This research again emphasized the importance of gathering the best people one can find and then training them while they have them to become an asset to the organization. The personnel have to be worked with and molded after they arrive. The available selection of good people should aggressively receive training to start preparing them for the future (p.170).

The Army Regulation (AR-600-100) leadership development lays out eight "core leadership competencies" (p. 3). These eight could be an excellent tool in establishing a list of items that could be incorporated into the fire service model. In the Army you need to be able to;

1) lead others, 2) extend influence outside the chain of command, 3) set the example, 4) be a communicator, 5) have and create positive attitude, 6) never stop preparing oneself to lead, 7) mentor and prepare future leaders, 8) manage time and resources to get the results.

It should not go without mentioning that some have researched what bad traits are out there to be wary of. Kellerman (2004) did just that and reviewed hundreds of examples of bad leadership. She suggests that there are seven areas to evaluate; "incompetent, rigid, intemperate, callous, corrupt, insular, and evil" (p. 38). It should be noted that some of these traits may show themselves as the potential leader being ineffective in some aspect or they may show signs of being unethical in others.

In IFSTA (1999) they state that "today's company officer must be a much more versatile and better informed supervisor than in the past" (p. 1). The company officer will "have to deal with group dynamics, motivation, career counseling, and problem solving" (p. 1). In each chapter they address objectives contained in NFPA 1021. Some of the ideas they sight as helping to be successful as a company level officer are; learning the job and bringing past experience to the future, be supportive of the organization and the personnel, continue to learn and look for new learning opportunities, being able to know how and what to say and when to say it, set the bar and be able to lead, realize that actions and decisions have both good and bad results and take responsibility for those actions.

NFPA (2009) gives the prerequisites for the requirements of all personnel aspiring to become a company level officer and is the foundation for the work done by the IAFC in the title *Officers Development Handbook.* In chapter four sections 4.1-4.7 they discuss exclusively the recommended knowledge and requirements that a new leader needs in today's fire service. They consist of; NFPA (2009) "human resource management, community and government relations,

administration, inspection and investigation, emergency service delivery and health and safety".

This information was first established in 1971 and continues to revised on a regular basis with

the most recent being 2009.

In summary, the amount of literature and resources available on the topic of leadership

development was abundant and extensive albeit mostly from outside the fire service world it

demonstrates just how important personnel preparation is in a wide range of professions. The

literature in this ARP has pointed out many ideas and suggestions to help the MTDF work to

develop and establish the foundation for a program to assist firefighters in the transition to

company officer. The processes and ideas recognized in the ARP literature review clearly show

that many factors will need to be incorporated for it to be successful.

PROCEDURES

Descriptive research methodology was utilized in this research project. The first part of

this research began in the spring of 2010 at the Franklin-Springboro Public Library, Springboro,

Ohio. The other library utilized was the Dayton Metro Library, Miami Township Branch, in

Miamisburg, Ohio. Also available to this researcher were two online library tools. One was

through OhioLINK at Tiffin University which gave access to 48 million books and other library

materials, millions of electronic articles, 12,000 electronic journals, 140 electronic research

databases, 55,000 e-books, 19,500 theses and dissertations from Ohio students. The other online

tool was EBSCO host which is very similar to OhioLINK and was accessed through the Dayton

Public Library membership. Searches were also performed online at the National Fire

Academy's Learning Resource Center (LRC). The available information on this topic of research

was vast and varied. Through utilizing the questions and purpose of this applied research project

the resources were evaluated and assessed to put together the information contained in the pages of this project.

The second part of this research data collection was determined after reviewing the literature review materials gathered referencing the topic. It was determined that a survey would be conducted to get an idea of what current practices others in the fire service are doing to better select and prepare their personnel for the position of company officer.

The survey process consisted first of constructing the survey instrument itself by utilizing an on-line survey building service. The survey initially consisted of 13 questions. It was then sent out to a small group to pilot test it and search for possible problems with the questions or format. Following the return from the pilot group of evaluators, some of the suggestions and corrections were made and then the survey was sent to the Ohio Fire Executive (OFE) ARP evaluators. After returning from the OFE ARP evaluators the survey questions were again adjusted and one question was eliminated making the entire survey 12 questions. It was after these final corrections and adjustments that it was determined that the survey would be sent out to the selected sample group of professional fire service personnel. The time frame to respond was from November 13, 2010 through November 22, 2010. This was determined to be a limitation on the survey sample group as it was a relatively short nine day opportunity to get the survey answered.

The purpose of the survey was an attempt to assist in answering the three questions about fire officer development planning in the fire service. In the process of determining who would be the target group and receive the survey instrument it was decided an adequate sized group of fire officers should be able to best answer the survey questions. The availability of a large grouping

of fire service personnel electronic contacts was gathered. All the individuals were sent the opportunity to take this survey on November 13, 2010 via a current electronic contact listing from each respective organizations roster. The grouping consisted of 283 fire service personnel from the Montgomery County, Ohio fire chiefs group (57), the Butler County, Ohio fire chiefs group (63) and the Ohio Fire Executive (OFE) class graduates list (163). This is now determined to be a limitation in that the survey could have been guided toward a more diverse population than was selected and the input from a larger career range may have shed more light on issues larger than this research project.

The next step was then sending the survey with an email message (Appendix A). This email message stated a brief welcome and then gave the reader instructions on how to access the actual survey on-line. This was accomplished by utilizing the established on-line survey company and its ability to place a link in the email message sending the individual directly to the survey. Once at the survey the individual was met with an opening survey cover letter (Appendix B). This letter states the time frame restriction and the fact that all responses will remain anonymous. Following the survey cover letter the 12 question survey instrument began (Appendix C) with the results being gathered and tabulated by the on-line survey resource.

Following the closing date of the survey the data was then located all in one place for analysis electronically. Of that sample grouping the response was 98 surveys returned with 97 of those completed for a 99 % completion rate. That equates approximately only a 35 % return overall. Therefore bringing up a possible limitation in the fact it was such a small return of the total number targeted. Also possibly another limitation was the fact that no direct contact was

made with any of the sample group thus it is not known how many could not open the electronic survey or if they even received it due to possibly having a changed the email address.

RESULTS

Literature review and a survey instrument were the tools incorporated to find the answers to the 3 research questions posed in the introduction of this project. The first research question examined whether there are suggested criteria used to identify future fire officers. When reviewing the results found in the literature review concerning this question it was noted by Locke (1991) that there are character traits that can be recognized in which leaders will demonstrate that non-leaders will not. When analyzing what is mentioned in the various areas of public, private and military professions it is common for successful organizations to concentrate efforts to pick out personnel that have the criteria and have an interest in becoming leaders in the profession.

Question 7 was where the respondents selected from available criteria which they felt the candidates for fire officer should demonstrate. What was a pleasant surprise to the responses was the fact that morals and ethical values rated the highest of all available selections. This ties directly into the discussion found in the literature concerning the importance of finding personnel with the right values that organizations want, then nurturing those individuals into future leaders. The other side of that is the organization must communicate those values through a medium that encompasses all its personnel and must ensure it is the direction it wants to see its personnel go. The data collected is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Available selection criteria and the survey results.

Criteria	*Importance*
Morals and ethics	95.9%
Job Knowledge	94.8%
Communicates well	93.8 %
Common sense	92.8%
Interpersonal abilities	88.7%
Maturity	88.7%
Physically fit	64.9%
Computer skills	55.7%
Public Speaking	55.7%
Empathetic	47.4%
Follow me type	25.8 %
Political savvy	22.7 %

When addressing research question 2 the literature review found that there are skills and abilities that are associated with leadership. In looking at what is needed in the fire officer realm the (NFPA) 1021 *Standard for Fire Officer Professional Qualifications* demonstrates the foundation for establishing what is needed and could be used to help blueprint a fire officer development program. These suggestions could be used in conjunction with the organizations procedures and guidelines to develop a complete package for all the individual personnel aspiring to become a fire officer.

When looking at the information gathered by the survey instrument for research question 2, close to 97% of respondents agree that the process for preparing the fire officers should be addressed in their respective fire departments. Also discussed in survey question 5 by respondents as to what they consider should have been improved upon preparing firefighters for the promotion. Below in Table 2 we start to see a common thread between the criteria identified

in Table 1 and the items of preparation improvement listed. The idea that communication should

be a priority stands out as it is rated high in both survey responses.

Table 2. Available selection criteria and the survey results.

Criteria	Responses
Communication	77.3%
Discipline Issues	66.0%
Written Communication	58.8%
Tactics	57.7%
SOP/SOG Issues	53.6%
Computer Skills	47.4%
Budgetary	32.0 %
Hostile Work Place	22.7%
Harassment	21.6%
Collective Bargaining Issues	20.6%
Discrimination	13.4%

The 3rd research question was an inquiry as to what current practices are being utilized in

the fire service today. Again, in the fire service there are some good fundamentals found to build

upon through the IAFC and the NFPA. There are also many models in the private and military

sectors on which an officer development program could be designed. The ones polled answered

that 68.0 % did not currently have a formal fire officer development program. Close to 20%

answered that they do work with some type of development program and only around 13% were

in the process of developing a program. This makes an interesting problem due to the earlier

mentioned response that close to 97% surveyed stated they agreed a program was necessary yet

close to 70% do not currently have a program in the works or planned in the near future.

The respondents site the lack of funding (55%) and fire department culture (50%) as the

two biggest hurdles in implementing a program in the organization in survey question 8. Though

funding may be a strong issue to be tackled, there are funding sources available that fire

departments can access to assist with staffing cost concerns that may be untapped. This would be

an area of further research outside the scope of this particular project. As for dealing with an

organizations culture, it should be noted that in other professions and organizations the use of a

strong leadership cadre can make a difference with use of good management practices for the

promotion of change. This also needs further research into the process of developing that strong

leadership that is currently in place within fire organizations.

The survey questions 3 and 4 discussion was centered on what the respondents currently

use for training and what is felt to be the most valuable in preparing the future fire leadership.

When reviewing the combined data in Chart 1 below it is noted that self-development ranks

lowest in value when it comes to a priority as component of a development program. Most of the

polled fire departments site a funding issue as the problem with implementing a fire officer

development program. These same organizations utilize an educational reimbursement program

as the current practice for preparing its personnel. Looking at reducing the less effective self-

development/education reimbursement may be an area of cost reduction and financial re-

distribution to better serve the organizations found to be strapped for funding.

Chart 1. Most valuable and currently used for development.
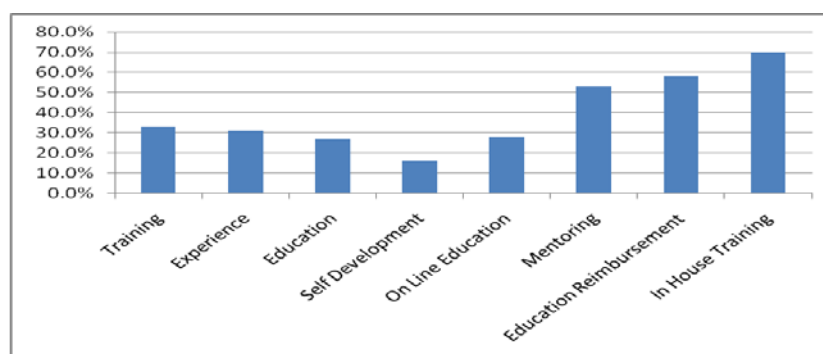
Still referring to gathering data to assist with research question 3 the respondents were asked in survey question 6 to refer to their experience as to which factors might be important in the development programs in the organization represented. There were 11 possible choices to rate in a scale from strongly agreed to strongly disagreed. Table 3 below displays the highest factors were in supportive management, mentoring, years on the job, yearly evaluations, and physical fitness. Again referring back to earlier polled answers that our respondents made, they make reference to funding being a significant issue in developing programs in the organizations. It can be seen here that the top five agreed upon factors are of low fiscal impact. This raises the question then why have the majority of the respondents not looked at implementing an officer development program? Further study and questioning is needed to research this area.

In the area of education the respondents show that fire academy and two year college resources should outweigh the more expensive and time consuming four year college and on-line type degrees. The latter here may be more appropriate factors for higher level positions within these organizations. Further research is required in the area of secondary education and its cost and benefit to the fire officer development.

Table 3. Factors important for fire fighter development. Selected 1-5, 1 being strongly agreed to 5 being strongly disagreed.

	1	2	3	4	5
Supportive management	**48.4% (46)**	33.7% (32)	9.5% (9)	5.3% (5)	3.2% (3)
Mentoring	38.5% (37)	**41.7% (40)**	14.6% (14)	5.2% (5)	0.0% (0)
Yearly Evaluations	25.3% (24)	**36.8% (35)**	21.1% (20)	11.6% (11)	5.3% (5)
Years on the Job	27.1% (26)	**32.3% (31)**	27.1% (26)	10.4% (10)	3.1% (3)
Physical Fitness	12.6% (12)	**46.3% (44)**	29.5% (28)	8.4% (8)	3.2% (3)
Fire Academy	16.7% (16)	**43.8% (42)**	34.4% (33)	5.2% (5)	0.0% (0)
Two Year College	12.8% (12)	**39.4% (37)**	28.7% (27)	12.8% (12)	6.4% (6)
Comfortable Environment	15.5% (15)	**35.1% (34)**	25.8% (25)	17.5% (17)	6.2% (6)
Four Year College	8.5% (8)	**29.8% (28)**	20.2% (19)	25.5% (24)	16.0% (15)
On Line College	3.3% (3)	28.3% (26)	**37.0% (34)**	20.7% (19)	10.9% (10)
Union Experience	3.2% (3)	17.2% (16)	**35.5% (33)**	16.1% (15)	28.0% (26)

In survey questions 9-12, the respondents reveal the make-up of the group. The majority (54%) were from combination departments with full time departments following with slightly smaller numbers (31%). There were only a small number of (10%) of departments that were not from a city or township municipal department. The individuals themselves were primarily executive officers (65%) with a slightly smaller group of company level officers (30%). The greatest number of these individuals (90%) had sixteen years or more in the fire service.

DISCUSSION

It is clear that the majority of fire departments do not have a formal officer

development program. It appears to be an inherited issue based on the traditional absence of such

programs in the departments. With more than two thirds of the respondents in this particular

study working in departments that lack an actual program, it is clear that they also lack clear

development goals. Lombardo and Eichinger (2007) go so far as to say that by simply having a

program in place to develop the personnel, production can be multiplied many times. The

missing link in the fire service could be the lack of a productive relationship with the human

resource department, which could be used to run such leadership programs. Over half of the

respondents indicated that there is a real gap between the current preparations of the fire officers

to where it should be. Such issues as training, education, experience and self-development are

key elements in the development programs. Training is considered as the most valuable, frankly

because the fire department is an active, ever evolving career. Self-development is considered

least valuable because of several reasons, one being that the formal programs for development

would incorporate very little in terms of personal progress tracking. Of the four, training should

be featured prominently so that the others can be possible. NFPA 1021 (2009) simply states that

the fire fighter must continue to learn throughout a career through training and education.

Another issue may be that most fire departments elect to do in house education. Very few

of them actually incorporate the marvels of online education, which would essentially sort out

the logistics and some of the costs of having to go on educational leave or paying for other forms

of education that may be offered at no cost online. This is most likely tied to the fact it is still an

unknown to some departments and more economically manageable to others. As a measure of

the things that are currently faulty in the development programs, communication features prominently, it actually got a 77.3% affirmative response as the one thing that could have been better during the preparation for promotion to a leadership position. The issues of communication are many, but they are all connected by one factor. Even those that got a lower score such as computer skills, discipline issues, written communication and SOP/SOG issues are all connected by the lack of effective communication. This means that the greatest reason for the lack of effective leadership in the company officer position is actually a lack of effective communication in the training. IFSTA (1999) discusses the importance of the abilities of today's fire officers in being able to communicate effectively when dealing with issue of counseling, inspiration, and personnel chemistry. The respondents did not consider other issues such as hostile work place, budgetary concerns and discrimination as very prominent since only 32.0 % of the respondents consider budgetary concerns as playing a role, it is therefore logical to conclude that these fire departments, most of them funded by the levies and general funds in municipalities and districts, have enough money to make formal officer development procedures, but they have none because they simply do not consider them a priority at this time or do not foresee the economic benefit of having a well trained officer corps.

The most important element in training is supportive management, which builds on the earlier aspect of communication. This explains why it got a 48.4% rating of 'strongly agree' among the respondents. Again, this shows that the missing link has been entirely overlooked as a concern of the executive leadership. In real essence, the fire departments already have effective programs for education, training, evaluations, fitness and work environment but without effective leadership, all this is futile. Another notable statistic from the survey is that none of those polled actually thought that mentoring and academy type training should be considered as important.

This raises several flags because the fire department, having a hierarchical structure mostly based on the number of years on the job, should be essentially built on mentorship. The essence of academy type training does not stand up to training on the job, but it should not be completely disregarded in the structure of the officer development program.

The respondents agree that fire officer candidates, being leaders, should exhibit the highest level of morals and ethics in their work and life. With a 95.9% affirmative response, this means that it is important for the officer to have a good moral code. The inconsistency here is that in the earlier question, the respondents had selected mentoring as the least important trait. Where issues of morals and ethics are concerned, other than in the issues that are based on personal choice and nature, others must be demonstrated and taught by the current leadership. Other elements that feature prominently are communication, interpersonal skills, common sense, skill, job knowledge and maturity. Political savvy, which one would expect to have a connection to public speaking skill, only has 22.7% in this particular survey due to it being a trait necessary for higher levels of leadership. Leadership weaknesses, such as, the dictatorial follow me type also got low affirmative responses because of the elements of independence and the essence of the common sense and interpersonal abilities weighing heavily in the fire service. Again, computer skills were selected by more than half of the respondents although at 55.7%, it still did not feature as prominently as one would expect it to. Having computer skills would simplify the work of a fire officer tremendously because of the duties dealing with having to file reports, education, training, and research communication and information disbursement.

Ironically, more than half of the respondents anticipated the lack of funding as the greatest issue if a program was to be implemented. The only thing that compares to that, and the weakness and strength of all disciplined forces, is the fire department culture at 49.5%. The

former could be because most of them are funded by a government body but, with the correct budgetary allocations, the departments could effectively run a successful fire officer development program. This calls for a review of the current priorities in the fire service area addressed by the respondents. Since most of the fire service is under a microscope to follow an ever decreasing budgetary issue, it will benefit all involved to look at new ways to incorporate successful programs such as this with the goal being not to reach into the budget for funding. At the same time, recommendations to government bodies to increase their budget allocations to the fire departments, or run the programs through other educational opportunities could take the burden from the individual fire departments but this seems an unlikely option in these economic times.

The age factor also features prominently in this particular mix of respondents to the survey. 70.1% of those polled had over 21 years in the fire service and an almost equal number are executive officers. Considering that most of them had not considered the years in the fire service as being very important, the fire officer program does not need to meet any pre-existing structure. They may be suggesting that years of service without proper guidance leads to deficiencies in many aspects. This might also hint that the respondents recognize what Hazarika (2009) suggest in that the future of an organization relates directly to the depth and effectiveness of its leadership group and that groups training and experience. This might imply that they most likely felt unprepared for the positions and did not get the training opportunities they required thus creating a weak link in the current programs. Since most of them are executive officers, the fact that they have noted these issues is very telling of the prevailing standard shift.

In summary, it is clear that there is a glaring issue in the fire service and at MTDF when it comes to the issue of leadership development. Through the survey instrument utilizing the fire

service and also the results of the literature review this research has exposed that inside, as well as, outside the fire service recognize the criticality of developing the personnel for the roles in leadership. What is also acknowledged in this ARP is the commonality between the values and issues outside the fire service and what is recognized by those surveyed in the fire service as being important for success and very similar. These and other factors can be used to help establish a officer development program for MTDF.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The current officer position vacancies at MTDF have lead to an opportunity to create some type of program to prepare and develop the personnel for positions of leadership. The research gathered in this ARP suggests that there are many ways to go about evaluating and making a plan to implement a change in the current employed. Utilizing the research gathered in the literature review and survey instrument there are several validated recommendations.

1. The MTDF executive staff should meet and use this ARP information to help determine a needs assessment of its current personnel. This information can be supplemented with utilizing a proven and recognized personality evaluation tool and personal assessments of all personnel that show an interest in an officer development program. The Miami Township Human Resources department will be a good place to acquire the information on this type of evaluation. This will help determine those personnel that meet known leadership criteria, job abilities criteria and general skills and knowledge criteria. The use of a labor and management collaborative is recommended and encouraged to allow input in the process from the start and through to the finish to

aid in the "buy in" of all participants. This program or process will be based on the many job functions and weaknesses that where recognized through the initial evaluation of the current practices at MTDF.

2.   Those personnel that need to improve or to "work up" to the established criteria are recognized and put through an internal program to raise them to the level of comfort. This process shall be a fluid one that can blend in new participants and allow others to get out of the program at anytime. As demonstrated in the survey instrument, a large emphasis will focus on all parts of communication as it exposed itself as the overwhelming issue in the officer development problem.

3.   Currently MTDF has a program that is used for newly hired fire fighters to acclimate themselves to the ways of the organization. This program is title the "Green Book" (GB). In the GB employees go through extensive training to cover all aspects that are evaluated and considered of importance by the MTDF officer staff. This GB could serve as blueprint in building a similar book for the personnel interested in becoming an officer. It is recommended that a book be established and in it will be found the criteria and job expectations for future officers of MTDF. This new book will be titled the "Red Book" (RB) and shall contain information from this ARP, known Miami Township policy and procedures, the Union collective bargaining agreement, and many other sources from the private sector as well as the public sector. This can

then serve as a guide to be distributed to all personnel interested in moving from fire fighter to officer.

4.   The RB would then serve as an internal program to evaluate personnel and the progress each one is making toward meeting the established criteria. It will also give each person a way to evaluate themselves for tracking progress and deficiencies in each one's own quest for meeting the goals. This process lends itself into also having functional and beneficial evaluations for, again, mutual benefit of both the individual and the organization.

5.   During the literature review and survey it was noted that passing on the information from one person to the next served a smooth and comfortable transition for all concerned. This would work well for the MTDF to look at establishing some type of mentorship program to roll alongside the RB agenda. This would help in improving job skills and competencies through the use of the current officer cadre as mentors. It is recommended that further research be done to assess how other organizations and fire departments perform a mentorship and the tools needed to carry it out effectively.

6.   There should be a very real time frame established and adhered to. This program will need re-evaluated on a regular basis to make sure that it is going in the right direction. That can be accomplished through regular discussion in labor and management meetings and executive officer

meetings. This will allow for everyone to have input and to adjust if

some new training becomes important or some item becomes obsolete.

In conclusion, it must be mentioned that there is a sincere concern of the current

economic environment and its affect on the fire service in general. Future research on this subject

matter must be weighed against the ever increasing issue of managing fire departments with less

funding. This does bring to point that, through research; a better more efficient officer corps at

MTDF can be developed and kept in-house. The idea is to focus how it will be done and put it

high on the priority list within the organization. Properly trained and skilled personnel managing

the department can only help now and into the fiscally unknown future.

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Appendix A

Email Cover Letter

Fire Professional,

Please take a moment to complete a survey for my Ohio Fire Executive class research project. Just click on the survey monkey link below and it will take you to the web survey. Should that not work for you just copy and paste the link to your web browser and hit search.

This research will go a long way to possibly establishing policy and procedure for our department. Your responses are completely anonymous, should you wish to get a copy of the anonymous results just send me an email and I'll get it to you following the completion of the survey.

Please forward this on to others in the fire service who you feel would not mind participating…

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/KJJDWK8

Thanks in advance
Jim

Jim Baber
Lieutenant
Miami Township Division of Fire/EMS
2710 Lyons Road
Miamisburg, Ohio 45342
Work Ph 937-433-4242

Appendix B

Survey Cover Letter

November 13, 2010

The survey that follows this introduction is for a research project for the Ohio Fire Executive

Program. I am asking you for few moments of your valuable time to help in assisting me gather

as much information as I can. Your help will go toward making this project a valuable tool that

may be used to form a new program at our department.

The survey is 12 questions and should take only a few minutes. Please complete this survey by

November 22, 2010.

Thank you for your assistance and information, all survey respondents will remain anonymous

and their input will be kept confidential.

Should you wish a copy of the (anonymous) results of this survey please contact me at the email

address below and I will send them following the completion due date.

Thank you in advance

Jim B. Baber Jr.

Lieutenant

Miami Township Division of Fire/EMS

jbaber@miamitownship.com

Appendix C

Survey Instrument

1. Does your department have a formal fire officer development program? Check all that apply.

    - Yes
    - No
    - In Process of developing
    - Human Resources handles
    - Governed by Civil Service

2. Do you feel preparation of fire fighters for the role of fire officers is a topic that needs to be addressed in your fire department?

    - Strongly Agree
    - Agree
    - Neutral
    - Disagree
    - Strongly Disagree

3. Rate the value of the following in order of priority as components of a development program preparing firefighters to become fire officers, utilize a 1-4 scale with 1 being the most valuable and 4 being the least valuable.

    - Training
    - Education
    - Experience
    - Self Development
    - Other

4. What current fire fighter to fire officer development practices does your department utilize? (Check all that apply)

    - Mentoring
    - In house education
    - Education reimbursement
    - On line education
    - Other (please specify)

5. Based on what you have seen in your organization, what do you feel are some of the items that could have been better addressed in preparing the fire fighter for the move to the company officer position?(check all that apply)

- Discrimination
- Communication
- Discipline issues
- Written communication
- Computer skills
- Hostile work place
- Collective Bargaining issues (contract)
- SOP/SOG issues
- Tactics
- Budgetary
- Harassment
- Other (please specify)

6. Based on your experience, rate the following based on how strongly you agree or disagree their importance are to fire fighter development for the fire officer. (Utilize a 1-5 scale, 1 being strongly agree and 5 being strongly disagree)

- Four Year College
- Comfortable Work Environment
- Physical Fitness
- Online College
- Union Experience
- Supportive Management
- Two Year Technical College
- Fire Academy Type Training
- Mentoring
- Yearly Evaluations
- Years on the Job
- Other

7. Based on your experience what criteria do you feel fire officer candidates should demonstrate or possess? (Check all that apply)

- Communicates well
- Public Speaking
- Follow me type
- Job Knowledge
- Empathetic
- Common sense
- Political savvy
- Interpersonal abilities
- Maturity
- Physically fit
- Computer skills
- Morals and ethics
- Other (please specify)

8. What problem(s) do you foresee or have you had in implementing a program in fire officer development in your organization?

- Lack of fire management commitment
- Lack of funding
- No support from administration management
- Union Issues
- Fire department culture
- Civil service
- Other (please specify)

9. Please select the one that best describes your staffing.

- All full time
- All part time
- Volunteer
- Combination
- Other (please specify)

10. What type below best describes your department?

- Municipal (city, township)
- Military
- Fire District
- Airport
- Private
- Other (please specify)

11. How long have you served in the fire service?

- 0-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 16-20 years
- 21 +

12. What position(s) do you currently hold?
- Inspection/Bureau
- Fire fighter
- Paramedic
- Company level officer
- Executive officer

Appendix D

Survey Results

1. Does your department have a formal fire officer development program? Check all that apply.
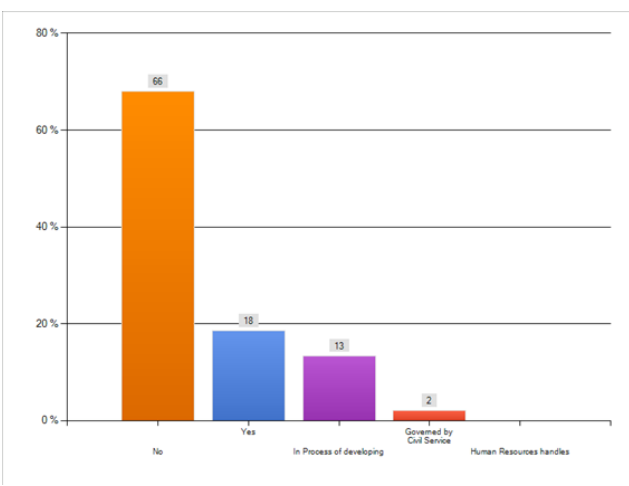

2. Do you feel preparation of fire fighters for the role of fire officers is a topic that needs to be addressed in your fire department?
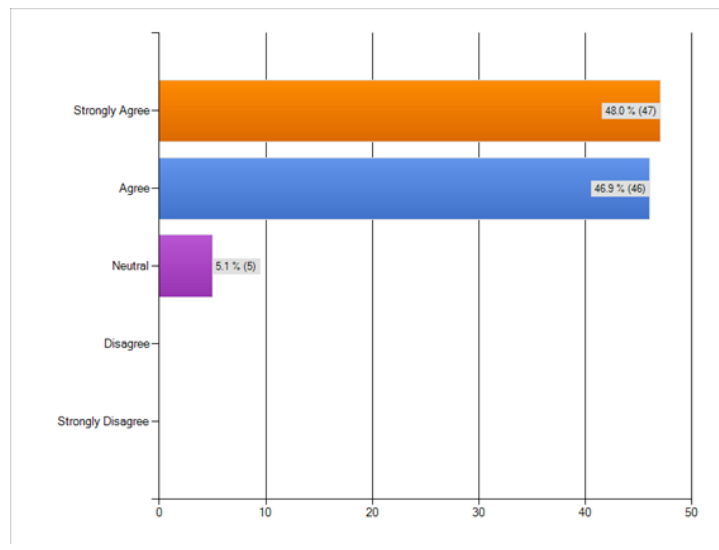
3. Rate the value of the following in order of priority as components of a development program preparing firefighters to become fire officers, utilize a 1-4 scale with 1 being the most valuable and 4 being the least valuable.
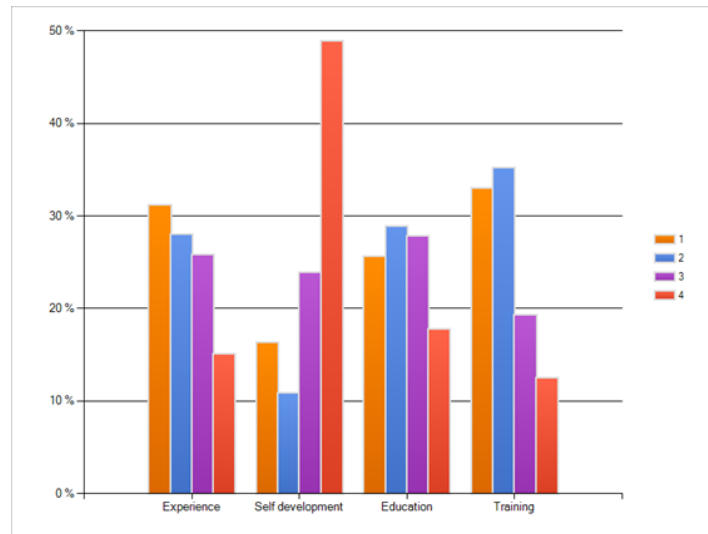
4. What current fire fighter to fire officer development practices does your department utilize? (Check all that apply)
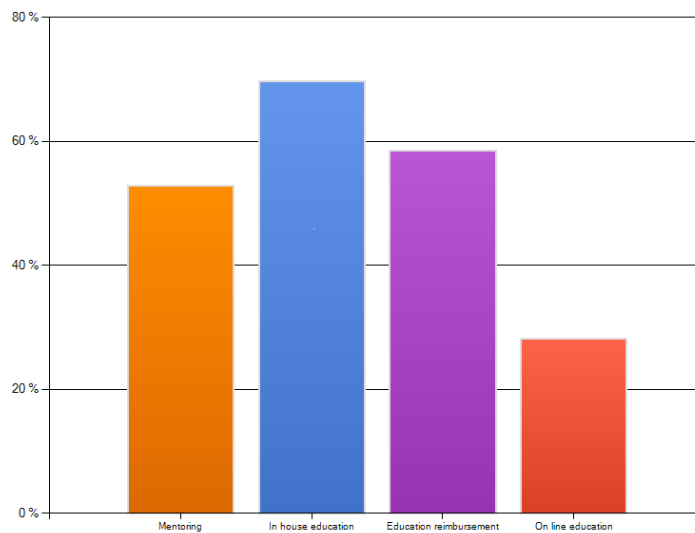
5. Based on what you have seen in your organization, what do you feel are some of the items that could have been better addressed in preparing the fire fighter for the move to the company officer position?(check all that apply)
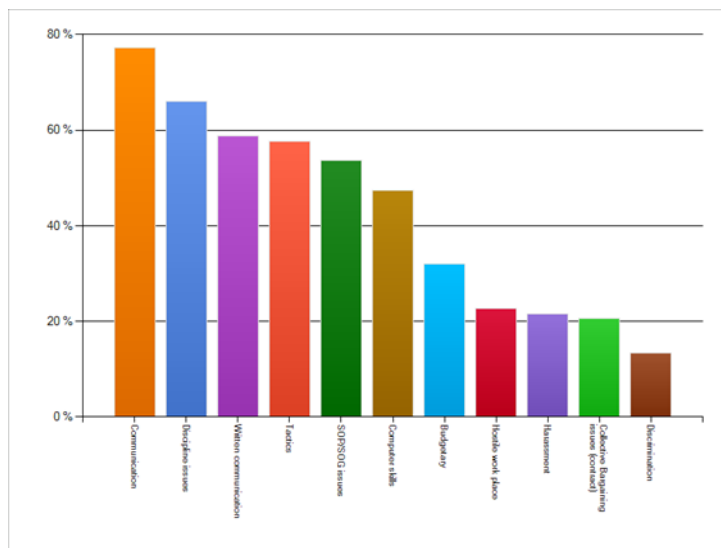
6. Based on your experience, rate the following based on how strongly you agree or disagree their importance are to fire fighter development for the fire officer. (Utilize a 1-5 scale, 1 being strongly agree and 5 being strongly disagree)
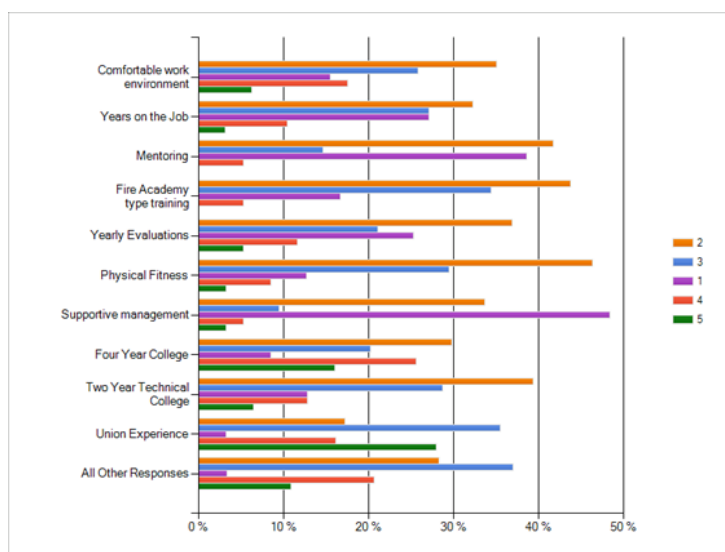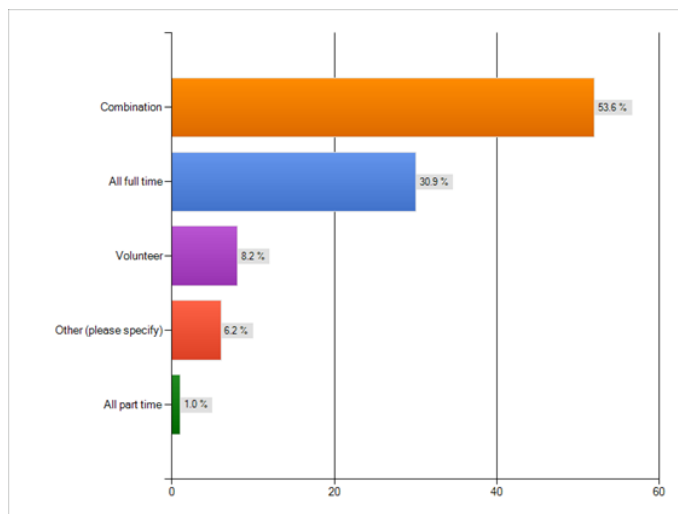
7. Based on your experience what criteria do you feel fire officer candidates should demonstrate or possess? (Check all that apply)
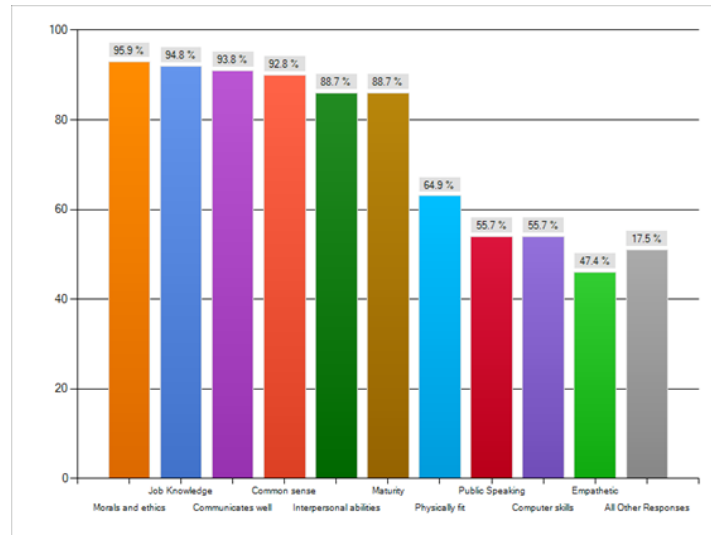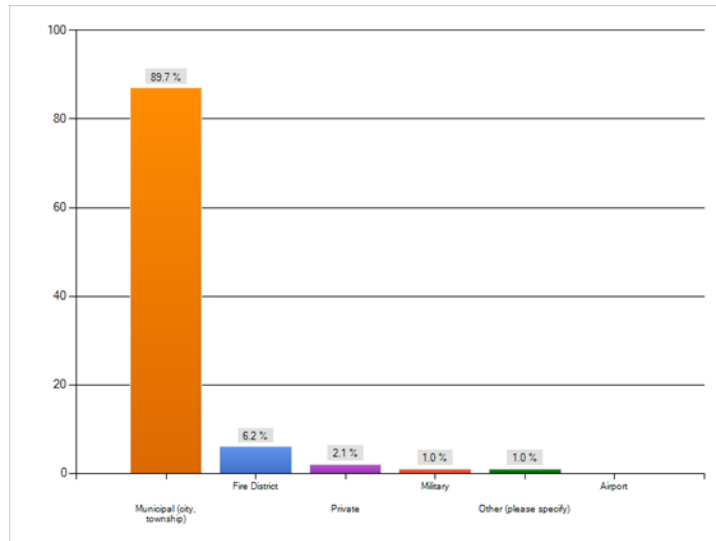

8. What problem(s) do you foresee or have you had in implementing a program in fire officer development in your organization?
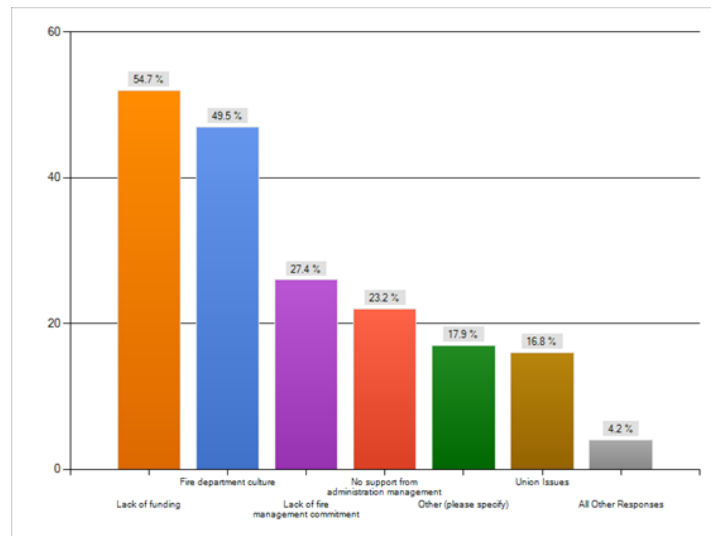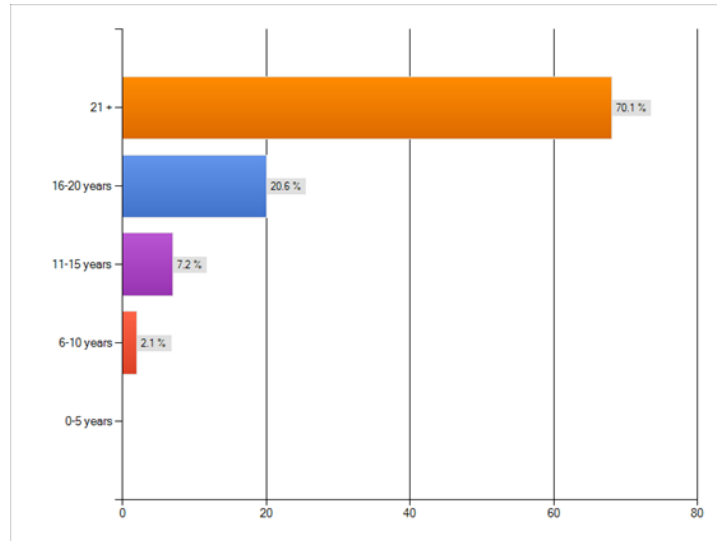
9. Please select the one that best describes your staffing.

10. What type below best describes your department?

11. How long have you served in the fire service?

12. What position(s) do you currently hold?