

**Organizational Structure in the Norwich Township Fire Department:
Are We Using All the Positions To Our Full Potential?**

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A research project submitted to the Ohio Fire Executive Program

7/26/13

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.

Signed: _____

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ABSTRACT

The problem addressed in this study was organizational structure/communication in The Norwich Township Fire Department and if it was being utilized efficiently.

The purpose was to research if current communication channels are meeting the needs of the department. The descriptive research method was use to answer the following three questions;

1. How does NTFD utilize all the command positions within the organization?
2. How would the addition of a captain on the fifty-six hour shifts help with the day-to-day operations?
3. What changes to the organizational structure could improve NTFD?

The researcher used previous research papers from OFE and NFA. Interviews with department members and an online survey were conducted. The results of the on line survey showed a consistent opinion that information is communicated in an acceptable and timely manner. The interviews had similar results. One constant theme was present: a lack of explanation for decisions that effect overall organizational operations produce distrust and anxiety. The observance of the crews and their communication differed at different times of the day, with early in the twenty-four hour shift being the best communication time.

The communication between the members of NTFD needs to improve by keeping the level of communication open and flowing continuously throughout the day.

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INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

On December 5, 2011 the position of battalion captain on the three-platoon system was escrowed and a battalion chief was implemented. This promotion reduced the daily chain of command/organizational structure of the Norwich Township Fire Department (NTFD) by one level of accountability, that is the officer responsible for the actions taken, along with the span of control, that is the officer responsible for the crew. By removing the captain's position, the communications between the officers has become an unclear path as to who to go to if issues arise.

The problem this study addressed was ineffective communications in the organizational structure as there was no clear path for information up or down a portion of the chain of command.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to provide information that will show if it's beneficial to NTFD to replace the captain position in the organizational structure and lines of communication in the department. Descriptive research was used for this project.

Research Questions

The research questions this study investigated are:

1. How does NTFD utilize all the command positions within the organization?
2. How would the addition of a captain on the fifty-six hour shifts help with the day-to-day operations?
3. What changes to the organizational structure could improve NTFD?

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

The Norwich Township Fire Department (NTFD) is located in the Northwestern area of Franklin County covering Norwich Township, the City of Hilliard, and Brown Township. The area covered is approximately thirty-six square miles and has a population of 34,100 (United States Census Bureau, 2010). The area is diverse in its suburban to rural lifestyle and settings with large companies to large farm fields.

Currently, the department has eighty-seven members with five assigned to the forty-hour workweek. The remaining eighty-two members are divided into three platoon shifts. Each shift is assigned twenty-seven members working twenty-four hours on duty and forty-eight hours off; each shift staffs out three stations. One lieutenant and five firefighter/paramedics are assigned to each of the two outlying stations. The central station is staffed with two lieutenants and a battalion chief along with twelve firefighter/paramedics. The department operates three medics, three engines, one ladder truck and a battalion vehicle.

As of December 5, 2011 the three positions of captain were replaced on the three-platoon system with that of a battalion chief. The former battalion captains were promoted to battalion chiefs. Prior to this, the three shifts had a battalion captain that oversaw the daily operations of the three stations and delegated to the lieutenants the daily fire and EMS operations, daily training at a company level, and projects that needed completion. These projects include such items as spring hydrant water flow testing, fall hydrant pumping, daily house hold cleaning, and small repairs as needed. Some questions associated with the lack of a captains position include: who does the battalion chief go to for daily shift responsibilities such as manpower distribution to each station when a

station may be below minimum staffing levels, and what scheduled training is necessary for the station or for an individual(s) firefighter(s) away from the station. Other topics include: handling meetings on new policy and procedures, handling discipline of staff, and command of fire scenes. Each shift completes the listed jobs at its own discretion, as was the case before the change in the organizational structure. Other training and daily jobs are done differently among the three shifts due to the lack of communication from a captain's level. This could be overseen on the shift and through cooperation with the other shift captains, to maintain consistency across shifts.

Without a captain's position on NTFD's three-platoon system, the lieutenant is riding as a battalion chief, a position which is two levels above his current rank. If there were a captain on each shift then the captain would take that responsibility when the battalion chief is off duty. This happens approximately fourteen times during the calendar year, less call off duty for illness or other personal reasons. When this happens, the lieutenant riding out of class might not have the backing of some of his crew due to lack of experience, inability to communicate, and inability to command at a fire or EMS scene.

Currently, NTFD has an eligibility list for promotion to the position of captain but does not have a position on the three-platoon shift (Norwich Township Fire Department/IAFF Local 1723, 2010). The top three lieutenants who took the exam are ranked, and are assigned to one of the three shifts so that they will be able to gain experience in the job requirements by riding out of class, along with their regular daily duties. This happens when the battalion chief is off-duty as explained previously. The top lieutenant on the eligibility list for that shift will be placed in the battalion chief's

position for that shift(s). The following is the definition from the NTFD Systems Manual Section 5: Out of class position will be filled using the current promotion eligibility list. The member ranked the highest on the list will be used to fill all out of class on that unit. Should the highest ranked member be off then the second highest member on the list will fill the out of class. If that member is unavailable, we will go down the current eligibility list until the position is filled (Township, 2010).

This could allow the members to gain confidence in the member(s) that could fill the position(s) and could allow for communication to flow better between the upper management and the shift members.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the book of Exodus, chapter 18 verses 24-26, Moses is tasked with understanding that all the issues his people have don't have to be heard by him but can be heard by other trusting and God fearing men that he trusts. "Moses listened to his father-in-law's advice and followed his suggestions. He chose capable men from all over Israel and appointed them as leaders over the people. He put them in charge of groups of one thousand, one hundred, fifty, and ten. These men were always available to solve the people's common disputes. They brought the major cases to Moses, but they took care of smaller matters themselves" (p.66-67) (New Believer's Bible, 2006). By having others handle the smaller issues Moses could concentrate on the major issues. "A lack of understanding regarding organizational structure and their influence on performance may negatively influence the choices made to resolve organizational problems" (Ledbetter, 2003).

The bigger an organization becomes, the larger the management team may need to be. This allows for more opportunities for employees to become specialized in different areas of need. “Which in organizational development literature asserts there is a connection between the service provided to the internal customers or members, and the service rendered to the external customers” (p.8) (Ledbetter, 2003).

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) has NFPA 1710, which deals with the *Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Operations, and Special Operations to the Public by Career Fire Departments*. The first edition of this was issued in 2001 and deals with creating standards for the career departments. It helps show how they should operate, from the basic organizational structure, and up to basic EMS and fire suppression services delivery just to name a few of the standards set forth in this document. Chapter 4 deals with the organizational requirements of career fire departments. This document is revised on a basis that allows for change for better structure of organizations (National Fire Protection Association, 2012).

Hassel addressed the question “Is there any published industry standard stating the number of staff command officers that a fire department should have?” Her answer to this was “No. I found no data that gave any specific number of staff command officers that a fire department should have” (p.20). Hassel continued to say that the Incident Command System is the only reference related to the span of control (Hassel 2002).

In an interview with Neil Jenkins, Jenkins responded when asked what the most effective communication channels are at CCE, that face-to-face is still hard to beat.

“There’s nothing like the buzz of a great conference or event, and its vital operational channel for thousands of our employees who work in manufacturing or field roles where they’re not online regularly”. (Strategic Communications Management [SMC], 2009)

Jenkins also states that it is important to make sure that line managers are effective communicators. In this way they can understand business goals to make them relevant for their teams. This “is the holy grail of most internal communicators.” (Strategic Communications Management [SMC], 2009)

There are positive effects that meetings have on organizations. Meetings have an ability to “provide the irreplaceable value of oral communications with key fire department and fire service leaders.” (p. 23) Cochran also stressed the importance of mid-level chief officers receiving information first hand because of their crucial role in the mission of the organization. (Cochran, 2006)

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2010) defines communication as a process that is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs or behavior, and an exchange of information. Kumuyi, (2010) states “Communication is an exchange that is not complete unless a response is received.” Feedback from the exchange is to be expected, but the person starting the exchange must allow for the feedback in this manner. First, you have to let the other person(s) know you want a response to your message and show that you respect them for their views and feelings. Second, you should demand feedback. Simply asking people for their opinions accomplishes this. Finally, by listening to the person(s) you show that you value their

opinion(s). Listen with an open mind and avoid interrupting the person(s) talking to you. Simply put, just listen to them.

Poor communication can cause the organization to disintegrate. There are better ways of getting your point across. Face to face instead of electronic mail, or even a phone call, will allow for better communication. Any communication breakdown will cause a breakdown of the motivation for the employee(s). Kumuyi states: “Workers will work for the pay: but they would be unwilling to go the extra mile to achieve anything extraordinary for the organization.” (p. 410) (Kumuyi, 2010)

Gerling suggest that respect, trust, and open and honest communications are among the most common values stated by fire departments. These values “are a call to achieve higher morale, a happier, more creative culture.” (Gerling, p. 50, 2009)

After going through a self-assessment on communication efforts in their organization, Chief Jay Tappan of The Columbia River Fire & Rescue in Oregon wrote in a personal communication on January 25, 2010. “We found that we really needed to do a better job of getting things out there. Any time an organization is under financial stress, communicating very clearly becomes a top priority.”

In summary, the literature review found several sources that were relevant to the topic and the questions this researcher has asked. The data that was researched supports that organizational structure/communication issues are not new to the fire service or any business or industry.

PROCEDURES

In order to answer the questions this researcher has brought forward, the literature review began with the Ohio Fire Chiefs Association website and the archived

research papers in their database, the website for The National Fire Academy in Emmitsburg, Maryland and the archived research papers in their database. Several periodicals, such as The National Fire Protection Association and their website, related to the fire service and online articles related to the topic of the research questions.

Also used in this research was an online survey, through Survey Monkey, completed by eleven of the nineteen fire officers of NTFD. The survey questions were developed after looking at the archived papers from the listed sites as stated above. The questions include items starting with simple daily communication interaction with crews. Other issues of importance might come in communication from a battalion chief to a lieutenant or from a lieutenant to a battalion chief. The officers of the department were the only ones surveyed during this research as most of the breakdowns in communication came from these ranks. No outside surveys were conducted as this researcher wanted to find the true reason as to communication breakdown in NTFD. The responses were analyzed with Survey Monkey but not compared to any previous results as none have ever been established for NTFD.

Individual interviews were conducted with the fire chief and the forty-hour battalion chief. The questions asked of the chiefs were developed with the intent of finding why our communication was /is broken, and if it was due to not having a true chain of command. What would replacing the missing rank do for the departments' communication and chain of command, were the main objective in the interviews with the chiefs. The questions are located in appendix two.

Several conversations were had with one officer of two unit and two officers from three unit of NTFD on an individual basis to gather further information as to the topic of

the research. Questions were asked in regards to how the communication was seen from the two-unit officer. With a recent promotion, the assignment given to the candidates was on short notice and no guidance from the chiefs was available to the candidates. The three unit officers spoke about how information pertaining to the development of the new Safety Officer position was not communicated from the top down.

RESULTS

The nineteen fire officers of NTFD were asked eight questions that dealt with communications in the department. This researcher received eleven replies to the survey through Survey Monkey, the online survey machine that was used.

The questions that were asked and the replies are below and the appendix one of this research paper has the actual questions while the results are in appendix three.

Question 1: Does the shift you're assigned to accomplish the daily jobs and assignments it is tasked to do? Three officers replied; "All the time" and Eight officers replied "Most of the time".

Question 2: How often have you experienced a breakdown in communications between you and the department that impacted your job performance? One officer replied "Never", six officers replied "Seldom", and four officers replied "Occasionally".

Question 3: How often have you had a question/issue that had to go through a battalion chief to be resolved? One officer replied "Never", six officers replied "Seldom", and three officers replied "Occasionally".

Question 4: When you have had an issue that went through a battalion chief to be addressed, were you satisfied with the timeliness and flow of information in response to your issue? One officer replied "Completely satisfied", seven officers replied, "Mostly satisfied", and one officer replied "Mostly unsatisfied".

Question 5: If you had an issue that could not be handled by talking with a battalion chief, from whom did you obtain the information? Six officers replied "Fire Chief", one officer replied "Forty-hour battalion chief", one officer replied "Lieutenant", one officer replied "Firefighter", and two officers replied "Other".

Question 6: Does the lack of experience by an out of class lieutenant affect the daily jobs and assignments? Five officers replied “Seldom”, and six officers replied “Occasionally”.

Question 7: Have you received important information in a timely manner? Two officers replied “Occasionally” and nine officers replied “Frequently”.

Question 8: How many years have you been an officer at NTFD? Four officers replied “0-5 years”, three officers replied “6-10 years”, and four officers replied “11-15 years”.

In an interview with Fire Chief Bob Kaufman and a separate interview with forty-hour Battalion Chief John King they both had similar answers to the questions that are listed in Appendix Two of this paper.

Question 1: What was the cause for the reclassification of the battalion captain to a battalion chief? Chief Kaufman stated that fire departments generally follow military rank and that the battalion chief position was implemented to add authority when on runs with other fire departments and to have equal rank. This way other fire departments would not look at this position as a lower rank.

Chief King stated that it allows for the setup of the chain of command that is constant or equal with other Central Ohio fire departments and their hierarchy of command. The position was moved out of the forty-hour position to a platoon position to allow for more time in safety and EMS at twenty-four hours a day.

Question 2: In what way is the department operating more effectively since the battalion chief’s position was implemented? Chief Kaufman replied that the roles and responsibilities of the battalion chief are the same as when it was a battalion captain

position. The assistant fire chief position was escrowed and a fourth battalion chief was implemented, and the forty-hour battalion chief position freed up the fire chief from some responsibilities such as paying bills.

In Chief King's answer to question two he states that there is not much difference as this position is the same as before. The hold up in implementing the position on the three-platoon system was the May 2013 Fire Levy that was voted on by the community and passed by a two-thirds majority. This position allows the department to operate with more consistency. The crews know who is second-in-command on their respective shifts, and the unknown is now eliminated by removing a change from the promotional list every two years.

Question 3: In what way is the department operating less effectively since the battalion chief's position was implemented? Chief Kaufman stated that the three-company battalion chief sees the forty-hour battalion chief as an equal, not as administrative Chief King stated that he sees no change.

Question 4: What could a captain's position on the fifty-six hour shifts do for the day-to-day operations? Chief Kaufman stated that being available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year as a safety officer it is better use of the position. Utilizing a fifty-six hour work week versus a forty-hour workweek allows the captains to be available 2912 hours versus 2080 hours a year. They, the captains, will be able to work with the battalion chiefs and share the workload; the captains will have oversight, on their respective shifts, on EMS runs and to help train someone for the position in the future.

Chief King stated that oversight on serious EMS runs is a key point, as with a forty-hour EMS position fewer runs were taken. A safety officer on fire incidents is needed twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. Training with the shifts and a constant command presence on the shift is important. This also allows the chief to vet the captain for a possible future promotion to battalion chief.

Question 5: How would this position effect the organizational structure/communication? Chief Kaufman stated that having three people responsible for this will allow for better organizational flow and directs the crews who to go to for answers to questions.

Chief King stated that this would make things better from a communication viewpoint. By having the lieutenant to captain flow, and not directly to a battalion chief, this will allow for issues to be handled at the captain's level. This will allow the battalion chief to work on other higher level issues. By having a captains position, this gives the lieutenants a voice instead of having to go right to the battalion chief.

Question 6: What responsibilities would the captains have? Chief Kaufman and Chief King both answered this question with similar answers. The responsibilities of the captains will be divided among the three members who will fill the positions. One will be responsible for the overall EMS of the department, one will be responsible for the overall training of the department and one will be responsible for the overall safety of the department. On a daily basis they will meet with all three in charge medics and see if they have any needs.

DISCUSSION

While this research project was ongoing, the administration of NTFD changed a total of three times. Chief David Long retired in July of 2012 and his successor Chief Bob Kaufman retired in March of 2014. Chief Jeff Warren took over in March of 2014 and with him and his new administration is where the discussion and results can be used to improve the department.

The implementation of a fifty-six hour captain's position took place on July 1, 2013. With the addition of this position the organizational structure of NTFD has been reevaluated and restructured. With this position now in effect, communication issues that may have caused confusion are now more clear. Having a clearer path for questions regarding EMS, safety, and training allows the captains to provide a decision sooner. The captains have been assigned to focus on such issues while the battalion chiefs will handle the more administrative issues that arise on their shifts.

The implementation of the captain's position also gives over sight on critical EMS runs. These are runs where someone needs to manage the advanced life support procedures are being performed by the crews, or call for additional resources that may be needed for patient(s) transport(s). The captain will function as an incident safety officer on a fire or a complex rescue where crew and scene safety must be managed, while the battalion chief will function as the incident commander and run the overall operation.

As stated by retired Battalion Chief John King this position also gives the crews a more definite chain of command. Instead of a change every two years with promotional testing, as it was before the implementation of the captains, the crews were not certain as

to whom in the chain of command to report issues. With this change, communication could flow better from the bottom up and from the top down.

The use of the captains on the fifty-six hour shift improves the use of the three areas that have been assigned to the captains. These EMS, training, and safety positions provide coverage 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and 365 days a year.

When the survey that was received back from the nineteen officers at NTFD, the results showed that those that answered were satisfied with how the communications within the department are handled.

When casual conversation was held with an officer from two unit and two officers from three unit, the conversations showed that better communications were needed to meet the expectations of the administration.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The position of captain was reintroduced to the fifty-six hour shifts on July 1, 2013. It is recommended that this position be used to help with the structure and organization of the chain of command in the NTFD. As stated by retired Battalion Chief John King, the position gives the crews a clear understanding of who is second in command of the shift instead of a revolving list every two years.

It is recommended that the position of captain continues to be a fifty-six hour position, with EMS, safety, and training oversight as the main responsibilities. This brings coverage twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, and 365 days a year to the fifty-six hour shifts. This was an element of the position that was missing when it was a

forty-hour position. Between the hours of 4 pm and 8 am the coverage was sporadic if any at all.

It is recommended that with the addition of this position, the captains can make decisions within their authority quickly. Issues such as manpower or monetary issues must, of course, still proceed up the chain of command.

It is recommended that the captains visit each station daily to help maintain direct communications and to help eliminate any breakdown in communications that may occur.

This researcher's recommendation is to develop the captains position as needed in the command structure that the NTFD uses currently and to work on improving the communications of the department with the involvement of the complete chain of command. This process will be ongoing as there can be breakdowns in communication even when all the information is available. Use of as much face-to-face communication as possible should help bring the flow of information up to the expectations of the members of the department and the administration of the NTFD.

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APENDIX ONE – SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. Does the shift you're assigned to accomplish the daily jobs and assignments it is tasked to do?

_All of the time? _Most of the time? _Some of the time? _Seldom?
2. How often have you experienced a breakdown in communications between you and the department that impacted your job performance?

_Never? _Seldom? _Occasionally? _Frequently?
3. How often have you had a question/issue that had to go through a battalion chief to be resolved?

_Never? _Seldom? _Occasionally? _Frequently?
4. When you have had an issue that went through a battalion chief to be addressed, were you satisfied with the timeliness and flow of information in response to your issue?

_Completely satisfied? _Mostly satisfied? _Somewhat satisfied? _Mostly unsatisfied?
_Completely unsatisfied?
5. If you had an issue that could not be handled by talking with a battalion chief, who did obtain the information from?

_Fire Chief? _Forty-hour Battalion Chief? _Lieutenant? _Firefighter? _Other?
6. Does the lack of experience by an out of class lieutenant affect the daily jobs and assignments?

_Never? _Seldom? _Occasionally? _Frequently?
7. Have you received important information in a timely manner?

_Never? _Seldom? _Occasionally? _Frequently?

8. How many years have you been an officer at NTFD?

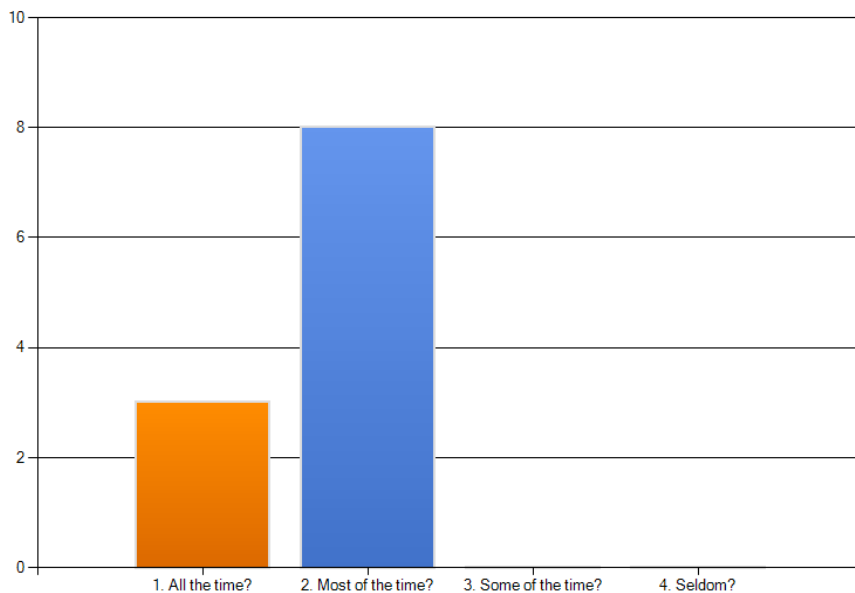
_0-5? _6-10? _11-15? _16-20? _21+?

APPENDIX TWO – INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

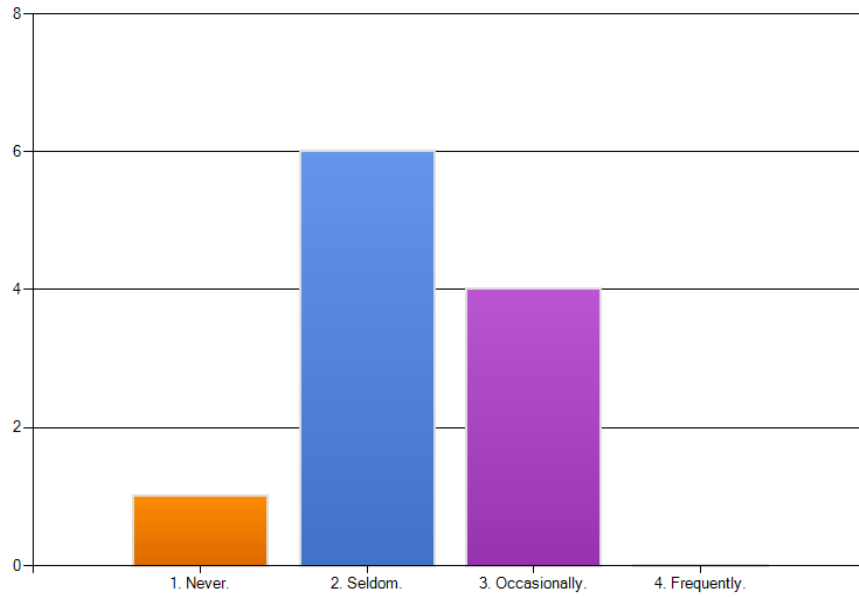
1. What was the cause for the reclassification of the battalion captain to a battalion chief?
2. In what way is the department operating more effectively since the battalion chief's position was implemented?
3. In what way is the department less effectively since the battalion chief's position was implemented?
4. What could a captain's position on the fifty-six hour shifts do for day-to-day operations?
5. How would this position effect the organizational structure/communication?
6. What responsibilities would the captains have?

APPENDIX THREE – SURVEY RESULTS

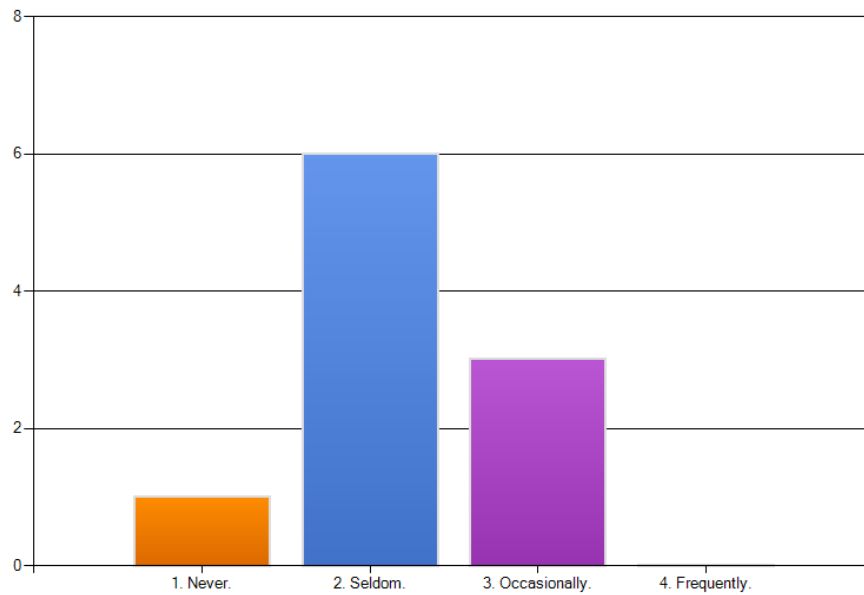
Does the shift your assigned to accomplish the daily jobs and assignments it is tasked to do?



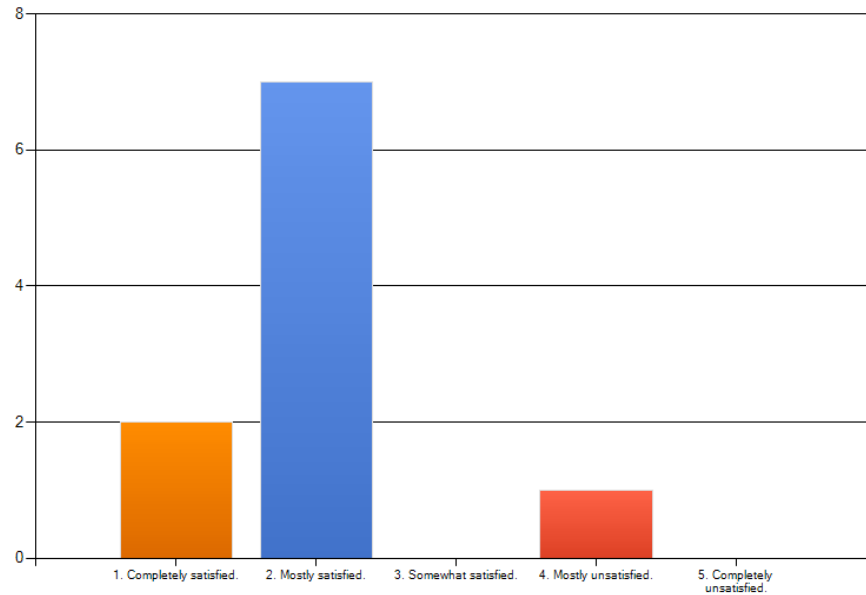
How often have you experienced a breakdown in communications between you and the department that impacted your job performance?



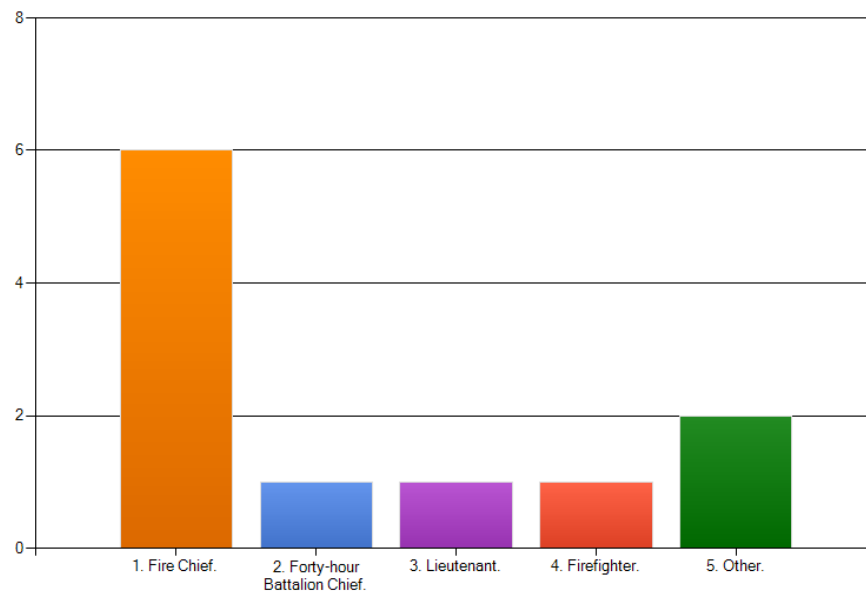
How often have you had a question/issue that had to go through a battalion chief to be resolved?



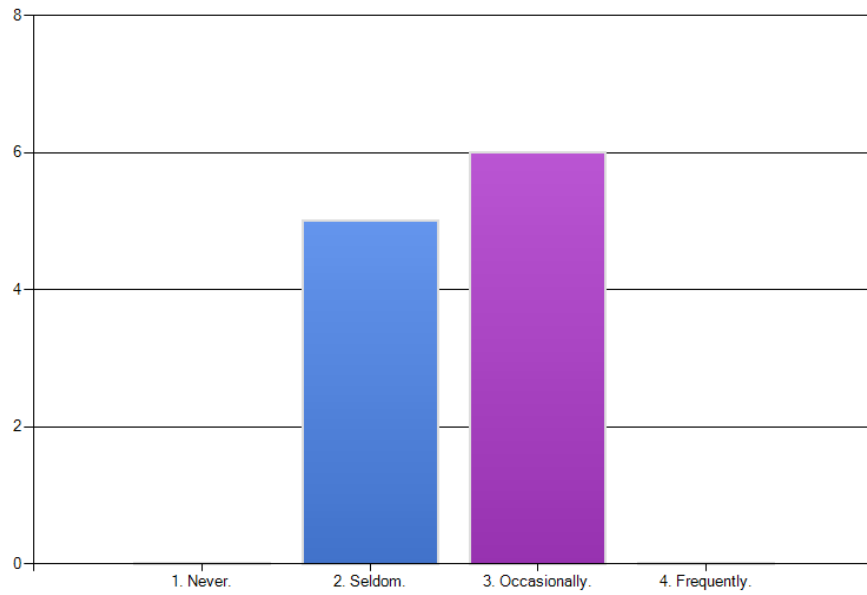
When you have had an issue that went through a battalion chief to be addressed, were you satisfied with the timeliness and flow of information in response to your issue?



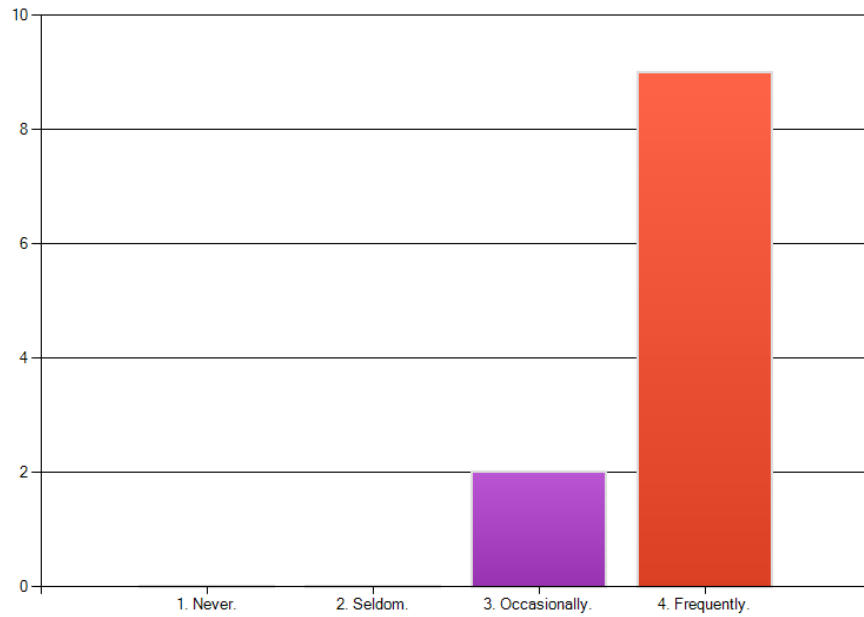
If you had an issue that could not be handled by talking with a battalion chief, who did you obtain the information from?



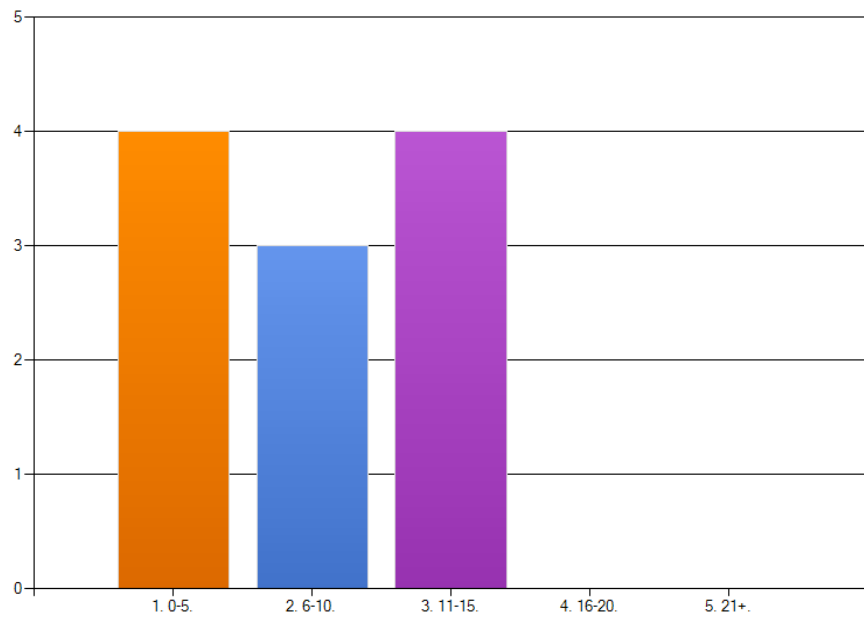
Does the lack of experience by an out of class lieutenant affect the daily jobs and assignments?



Have you received important information in a timely manner?



How many years have you been an officer at NTFD?



APPENDIX FOUR- INTERVIEW ANSWERS

In an interview with Fire Chief Bob Kaufman and a separate interview with forty-hour Battalion Chief John King they both had similar answers to the questions listed in the reference portion of this paper. Chief Kaufman stated that fire department's generally follow military rank and that the battalion chief position was implemented to add authority when on runs with other fire departments and to have equal rank. This way other fire departments would not look at this position as a lower rank.

Chief King stated that it allows for the set up of the chain of command that is constant with other Central Ohio fire departments and the hierarchy of command. The position was moved out of the forty-hour position to a platoon position to allow for more time in safety and EMS at twenty-four hours a day.

Chief Kaufman's reply to question two stated that the roles and responsibilities of the battalion chief are the same as when it was a battalion captain position. The assistant fire chief position was escrowed and a fourth battalion chief was implemented. This freed up the fire chief from some responsibilities such as paying bills.

In Chief King's answer to question two he states that there is not much difference as this position is the same as before. The delay in implementing the position on the three-platoon system was the May 2013 Fire Levy that was voted on by the community and passed by a two-thirds majority. This position allows the department to operate with more consistency. The crews know who is second-in-command on their respective shifts, and the unknown is now eliminated by removing a change from the promotional list every two years.

In question three, Chief Kaufman states that the three-company battalion chief's see the forty-hour battalion chief as an equal not as administrative and Chief King states he sees no change.

In question four, Chief Kaufman stated that with available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year as a safety officer is better use of the position. Utilizing a fifty-six hour work week versus a forty-hour workweek allows the captains to be available 2912 hours versus 2080 hours a year. They, the captains, will be able to work with the battalion chiefs and share the workload; the captains will have oversight, on their respective shifts, on EMS runs and to help train someone for the position in the future.

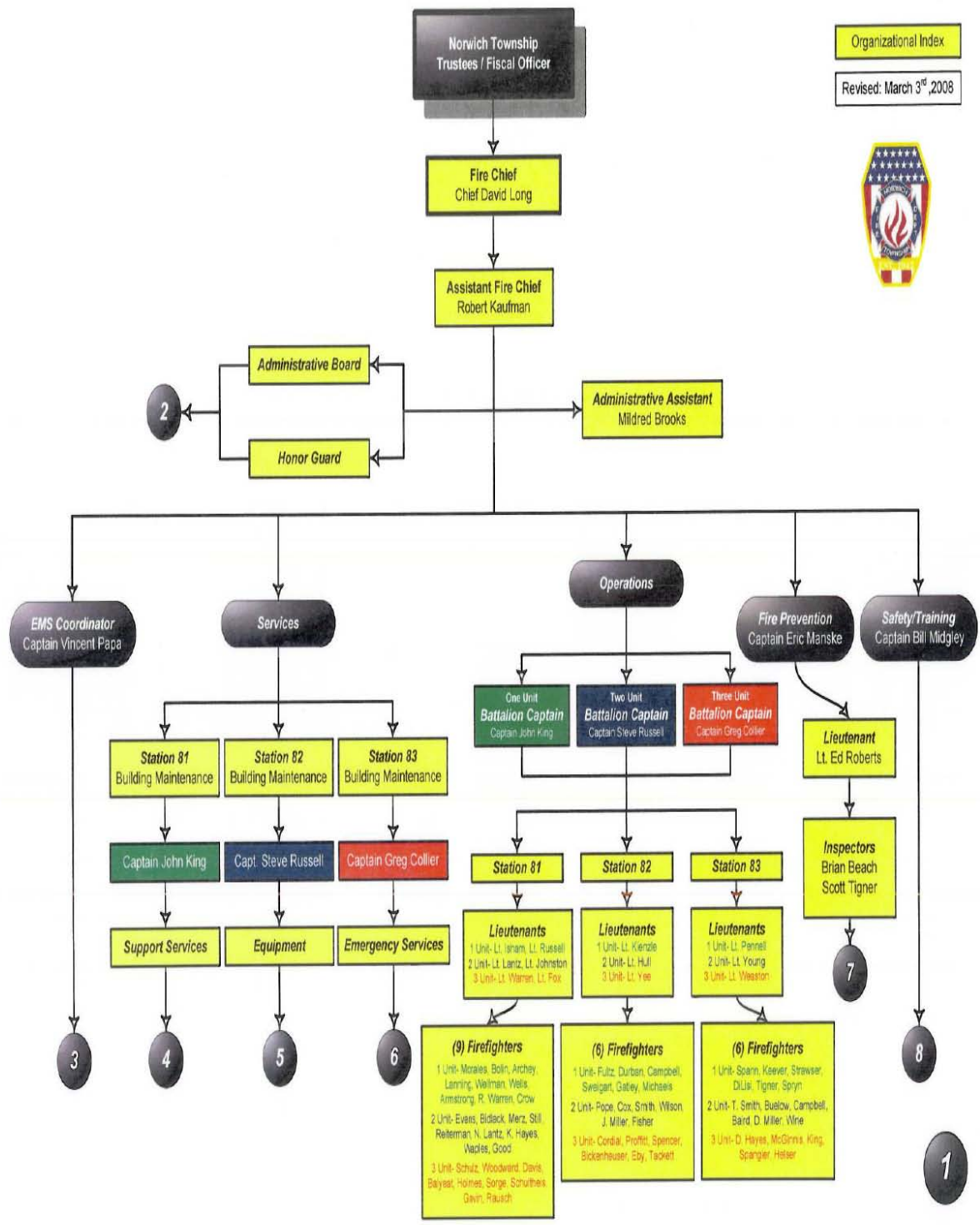
Chief King stated that oversight on serious EMS runs is a key point, as with a forty-hour EMS position fewer runs were taken. A safety officer on fire incidents is needed twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. Training with the shifts and a constant command presence on the shift is important. This also allows the chief to vet the captain for a possible future promotion to battalion chief.

In question five, Chief Kaufman stated that having three people responsible for this will allow for better organizational flow and directs the crews who to go to for answers to questions.

Chief King stated that this would make things better from a communication viewpoint. By having the lieutenant to captain flow, and not directly to a battalion chief, it will allow for issues to be handled at the captain's level. This will allow the battalion chief to work on other higher level issues. By having this it gives the lieutenants a voice instead of having to go right to the battalion chief.

The responsibilities of the captains will be divided among the three members who will fill the positions. One will be responsible for the overall EMS of the department, one will be responsible for the overall training of the department and one will be responsible for the overall safety of the department. On a daily basis they will meet with all three in charge medics and see if they have any needs.

APPENDIX FIVE – ORGANIZATIONAL CHARTS



Organizational Index

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