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ABSTRACT

THE INFLUENCE OF THE 7 HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE
DURING A MERGER OF A FIRE DEPARTMENT AND EMERGENCY
MEDICAL SERVICES IN A MIDWESTERN STATE: A
SINGLE CASE STUDY FROM 2007 TO 2013

by

Lisa Barnes Greco

Chair: Shirley Freed

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Dissertation

Andrews University

School of Education

Title: THE INFLUENCE OF THE 7 HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE DURING A MERGER OF A FIRE DEPARTMENT AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES IN A MIDWESTERN STATE: A SINGLE CASE STUDY FROM 2007 TO 2013

Name of researcher: Lisa Barnes Greco

Name and degree of faculty chair: Shirley Freed, Ph.D.

Date completed: April 2014

Problem

Organizational mergers are difficult and often chaotic at best, fraught with unknowns that can derail the best of plans. In this study, two cultures, fire suppression and emergency medical services, were brought together in order to create a stronger fire department by consolidating resources and knowledge and to appease an ever-tightening municipal budget. How to save the best practices from each side and create a new culture was the conundrum the leadership team faced.

The purpose of this study was to understand how Stephen Covey's *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* influenced the change dynamics experienced during the

merger of fire suppression and emergency medical services (EMS) in one American Midwestern fire department from 2007–2013.

Method

This case study relied on interviews and the lived experiences of the members of two organizations, along with artifacts and the Standard Operating Guidelines that are the operational policy and procedure documents found in any fire department. The assessment rating by the Insurance Standards Office provided an overall independent, external validation source of their performance. Interviewees self-selected into the research process based on an open-invitation letter to all members of the department.

Of the 106 members receiving the interview invitation, 23 members of varying rank in the department responded; the past and present mayors of River City also accepted. Open-ended questions were asked allowing participants to freely respond based on their vantage points during the merger process. Together, their stories and lived experiences chronicle the 10-year merger process while providing a unique look into the emotional and cultural atmosphere leadership faced when creating their merger strategy, a dilemma which significantly delayed the change process and impacted job performance.

Interviewees were assigned an identity-protective pseudonym which provided a much needed sense of “safeness” in order to speak without fear of reprisal. Compilation of the information gleaned during the interviews began with transcribing the interviews, which were processed using the Dedoose qualitative software program. Documents and artifacts indigenous to the River City Fire Department were utilized to strengthen the foundation of the research.

Results

Analysis revealed information and behaviors which corresponded to the research question: How did *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* influence the organizational change process during the merger of fire suppression and emergency medical response in one Midwestern fire department during the years of 2007–2013? Four specific areas of growth and improvement were clearly identified: (a) the prevailing passive-aggressive divisive spirit was replaced with a sense of department renewal and unification, (b) attitudes, language, and behavior changed, improving communication, (c) the overall structure was solidified to provide better services and, (d) Standard Operating Guidelines were updated to reflect the newly established practices.

Conclusions

This fire department experienced many of the pitfalls and successes organizational theorists predict in such situations. However, while those theorists provide a change framework to model, many of them do not consider the emotional elements that will surface when human beings are involved.

The emotions behind the passive-aggressive behavior in this study, which at times held this merger hostage, could have been assuaged had leadership anticipated problem areas of the merger and then sought the necessary support and training to work with the individuals involved. The result was a significant loss of time while everyone tried to figure out how to move forward together. Persistence and a pragmatic change process template found within the teachings of Covey's *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* eventually set this organization on a less troublesome path to success. Organizational language and leadership practices changed to mirror their new collaborative paradigm.

Additionally, a leadership mentoring program was developed so that future leaders would be trained to carry the new baton of leadership forward.

Andrews University

School of Education

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A SINGLE CASE STUDY FROM 2007 TO 2013

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by

Lisa Barnes Greco

April 2014

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An old African proverb states, *It takes a village to raise a child*. I agree. The love and philosophy behind those words has also applied to my academic experience: It took a village to raise a doctoral candidate. This undertaking would not have been successful without the love and tireless support of my “village.”

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To God be the Glory, for in *this* work, a great thing He hath done.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Change is prompted only when an organism decides that changing is the only way to maintain itself. —Margaret Wheatley

Background of the Problem

It is no secret that the world is changing. Organizations insisting on conducting business as usual are most likely to leave a legacy of failure (Scharmer, 2009). Consider these corporate giants, once household names but no longer in existence: Pan Am and TWA Airlines, Kodak Film, Woolworth's, E.F. Hutton, Arthur Anderson, General Foods, and Standard Oil. These organizations made the 2012 (MSNBC, 2012) list of the 15 most memorable organizations gone awry.

From 2001 to 2011, 46% of the Fortune 500 companies dropped off Fortune's coveted roster, while 84 of the top 100 corporate consortiums plummeted (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). Validating these data, Cameron and Quinn add, "Conditions in which organizations operate demand a response without which organizational demise is a frequent result" (p. 9).

Often, when an organization finds itself in turbulent times, the natural reaction is to panic, sometimes to the point of despair. Frenetic activity abounds as members watch what they once knew as solid and secure, dissipate (Beer, Eisenstat, & Spector, 1990). Wheatley (1999) reassures this state of imbalance and uncertainty is exactly the climate needed for creative resolutions to emerge. "The things we fear most in organizations—

disruptions, confusion, chaos—need not be interpreted as signs that we are about to be destroyed. Instead, these conditions are necessary to awaken creativity” (M. Wheatley, 1999, p. 21).

Understanding how an organization evolves, derives its identity, and interacts within itself and the surrounding world plays an important role in this study. Like a building set on a solid foundation, organizations also have foundational building blocks that can, whether through intentional or erratic design, either shoulder the weight of organizational change or not. Schein (2010) points to three levels of understanding one must have before gaining full insight into an organization’s culture and leadership foundation. They are: (a) artifacts, (b) espoused beliefs and values, and (c) a basic understanding of underlying assumptions. True understanding of an organization is best when examining its foundation. Schein states, “To understand a group’s culture, you must attempt to get at its shared basic assumptions and understand the learning process by which such shared basic assumptions evolve” (p. 32).

Cameron and Quinn (2011) agree with Schein’s (2010) foundational characteristics, referring to them as “underlying assumptions and taken-for-granted values” while adding two more of their own: definitions, so as to be clear on how a particular culture is being defined and, expectations, which is simply how things are done around here (Cameron & Quinn, 2011, p. 18).

These values can be taken for granted because they grow out of sentiments deep within an organization’s DNA manifesting as the rituals, heroes, and symbols of the organization’s members (Hofstede, Neuijen, Ohayv, & Sanders, 1990). Greenwood and Hinings (1996) offer an interesting metaphor for the values structure an organization

holds by referring to this body of knowingsness as a template. For example, organizations such as a bank or hospital will always operate with similar core values, assumptions, and beliefs. This explains, for instance, why someone can walk into any bank or hospital, know what is basically expected of that encounter, and walk away with the same core experience; they were in a template. The longer an organization has been in existence, the more profound their culture or template (Schein, 2010). For those within, the culture or template is often undetected until it is challenged (Cameron & Quinn, 2011).

The template holds the perimeters for all the organizational values and power distribution to the degree that those working within, who are unsatisfied, may not even be aware that the true source of their dissatisfaction stems from the prevailing template rather than from their co-workers or the day-to-day grind. Accordingly, then, mere personal dissatisfaction in and of itself is not enough to change a template. While some modifications, or “convergent change” as it is referred to by Greenwood and Hinings (1996, p. 34), can be made within the template, it would take a major upheaval to cause a radical change from one template to another.

In agreement with this model, Hershey, Blanchard, and Johnson (2001) view convergent change as “first-order change, change occurring within a stable system that remains unchanged” (p. 388). Because the presenting problem is not always the problem, convergent or first-order change merely provides enough of a shift, a band-aid in the moment, so to speak, to meet the presenting problem faced by an organization. It does not have the sweeping power of complete change that a radical change offers.

Statement of the Problem

Most organizational scholars and practitioners have recognized culture as having a powerful effect on the day-to-day performance and long-term effectiveness of the organization (Cameron & Quinn, 2011; Childress & Senn, 1995; Drucker, 1995; Heifetz, 2009; Kotter, 1996; Lewin & Grabbe, 1945; Scharmer, 2009; Schein, 2010; Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, & Flowers, 2004; M. J. Wheatley, 1999). As noted, “empirical research has produced an impressive array of findings demonstrating the importance of culture to enhancing organizational performance” (Cameron & Quinn, 2011, p. 39).

Therefore, when an organization needs to change the way it interacts within itself and with the world, the question for leadership becomes one of knowing where and how to start the change process. History shows that the collective effort of true change in an organization is often a long hard road strewn with collateral damage (Hershey, et al., 2001; Kotter & Cohen, 2002; Scharmer, 2009; Schein, 2010; Senge, et al., 2004; M. J. Wheatley, 1999; Wren, 1995). The subject of this study, a Midwestern fire department, needed to change the way it provided services by merging fire suppression and emergency medical response services. While they are two distinct entities, each bearing their own values, assumptions, and beliefs, their common bond of responding to emergencies and saving lives made them an obvious consolidation target for budget-minded municipalities in the early years of the 21st century, especially so after the 2008 stock market crash when many budgets drastically shrank.

In 2003, the fire department in this study was merged with the city’s emergency medical response division. Physically and on paper they became one department bearing

one name, yet they were two distinct entities with two mind-sets. Therein lies the problem.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand the influence of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (S. Covey, 1989) on the change dynamics experienced during the merger of fire suppression and emergency medical services (EMS) in one Midwestern state fire department from 2007-2013.

Research Question

The study was guided by the following research question: How did *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (S. Covey, 1989) inform the organizational change process during the merger of fire suppression and emergency medical response (EMS) in one Midwestern state fire department during the years 2007-2013?

Research Design

A qualitative single case study was used to answer the research question. Selecting the case study methodology is best when wanting to fully understand why and how a single decision or sequence of decisions, along with the outcomes, was made within a group, program, or organization (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Yin, 2009). It is also the best format when searching for understanding various elements initially not known and/or possibly yet to be revealed, and/or when deeper insight regarding the phenomena is needed (Creswell, 2008; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Yin, 2009).

It is the focus on the decision-making element of a case study which differentiates it from other methodologies. Because this study examined a very human process,

decision making, the expectation existed that unforeseen elements would emerge as the study progressed. A caveat was extended to my committee that some facets of the initial research design may change as needed to accommodate emerging categories of data (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Maxwell, 1996; Yin, 2009).

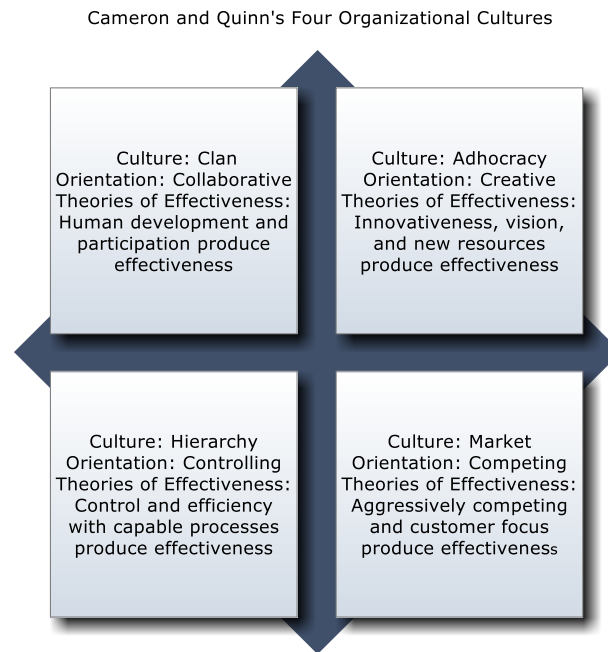
The nature of this study validated the process of research when examining a limited sample study. It also meets Yin's (2009) three cardinal points of a case study, to wit: (a) a technically distinctive situation with multiple elements of interest relying on it, (b) multiple sources of data which need to converge through triangulation, and (c) that the study is strengthened by prior theoretical findings.

The data in this study were drawn from observations, department documents, the department's Insurance Service Office (ISO—the universal performance standard of American fire departments) ratings history, artifacts, interviews, researcher journal entries, and the findings of organizational and leadership theorists.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is Cameron and Quinn's (2011) Competing Values Framework (CVF) model. Their model places less emphasis on formulaic answers while focusing more on the tools and mechanisms needed to work within any change scenario involving two or more interests/cultures. Much like a craftsman selecting the right tool for the job at hand, CVF empowers leadership to critically examine their organization in light of people, resources, values, beliefs, and assumptions. It further allows foundational change to emerge by creating an environment capable of supporting and sustaining future change endeavors (Cameron & Quinn, 2011, p. 2).

The metaphor of muscle groups in the human body helps to explain the power and value of each quadrant in the Competing Values Framework (see Figure 1). Consider that any organization is like a human body comprised of muscle groups. Through use, some



*Figure 1. Competing Values Framework. From *Diagnosing and Changing Organizational Culture: Based on the Competing Values Framework* (p. x), by K. Cameron and R. E. Quinn, 2011, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.*

muscle groups become stronger than others over time. When one muscle group becomes too strong, the others struggle to function. If an organization's cultural muscle of control (hierarchy) is too strong, it will overpower or kill the creativeness (adhocracy) of the members. If the collaborative nature (clan) is too strong, it may be a negative influence on competition as members give too much to the competition (market). A healthy

organization will strive for balance, or as close to balance as possible given their product or service, their members and resources.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions apply to terms appearing in this study:

Apparatus—usually refers to the fire trucks, ambulances, mobile equipment used by a fire department.

Emergency Medical Technician (EMT)— a person who is trained to give emergency medical care at the scene of an accident or in an ambulance.

Fireground—the location of a fire.

House—or fire house, also known as a fire station.

7H—*The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (Covey, 1989).

Incident—usually a fire but can be any situation requiring the presence of fire department personnel.

Insurance Standards Office (ISO)—the national performance rating system for all American fire departments.

Kitchen Table—the dining table in the kitchen of a fire house which is the safe zone for saying what needs to be said without fear of reprisal; also a place for casual training sessions.

Paramedic—emergency medical technician, full member of the fire department and often cross-trained as a firefighter.

Probie—also known as a probationary status firefighter with usually a year or less of experience; “rookie.”

Personal Safety Equipment (PSE)—safety equipment worn by a firefighter such as a face shield, turn-out gear, gloves, etc.

River City Fire Department (RCFD)—pseudonym for the Midwestern fire department under study.

Standard Operating Guidelines (SOGs)—the written policies and procedures for a fire department.

White Shirt—firefighting officer, for example, Chief, Assistant Chief, Battalion Chief.

Delimitations of the Study

My professional work in the River City community has provided a special vantage point with two organizations navigating the change process using S. Covey's (1989) *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, the fire department, and a union local. Observing the two organizations, I noticed the union local did not appear to be achieving the success milestones the fire department seemed to be enjoying. Knowing that leadership is a driving force in any organizational change process, I sought and was granted permission from the mayor and fire chief to examine the change phenomenon observed in this fire department as the subject of this dissertation.

The components I chose to examine were: (a) documents both internal and external to the department, (b) theses, white papers, and professional journal articles written by front-line firefighting and emergency medical practitioners, and (c) academic literature on organizational change and mergers. Individual interviews with both sides of leadership (fire suppression and emergency services) and focus groups with the rank and file of the department gave voice to the study.

With regard to other fire departments experiencing organizational change, I was able to validate only one other employing S. Covey's (1989) *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* as part of their change endeavor. Because that fire department was focused on new performance outcomes in light of decreased fire suppression calls, not merging services, it was suitable only for a marginal contrast and comparison of benchmarks for this study.

Finally, the study did not seek to examine other fire departments merging with emergency medical services as this study is focused on the use of S. Covey's (1989) work within the context of this merger dynamic.

Limitations of the Study

There are three limitations with this study. First, while fire department leadership and the mayor of the department's municipality gave full consent for this study, they requested, for liability reasons, that any personal or departmental information used in the study be handled in as discreet a manner as possible. They also requested written advanced notice prior to any of the study being published in any fire journal or publication.

The second limitation addresses the interviews and focus group process. It is necessary to remember that some of the firefighters may have been poor informants to this study. They may not have known how to accurately express what they knew or why they knew or not about something (Freeman & Romney, 1987; Frenk, Anderson, Chaves, & Martin, 2011), for example, the origins and reasons for hazing a probie. Additionally, some might have feared reprisal if they were fully candid. Such factors could have influenced member responses.

Finally, because this study focused on the process outcome(s) when merging two organizational cultures, it is important to be cognizant that I am not a member of either the firefighting or emergency medical service profession. Therefore, I could not fully know some of the more intimate nuances of their cultures as well as a member would.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study, academically, is that it bridges the traditional body of organizational change knowledge found in the literature—the theoretical, with the writings of firefighters not found in traditional databases which informed the praxis. The rich and robust experiential writings of these firefighters need to be embraced by the academic community as an emergent area of scholarship.

The pragmatic significance of this study is that it provides a very clear-cut, step-by-step proven template for change. While academic theorists provide a wealth of ideas about how to change or why change is needed, the members of the River City Fire Department lived through and daily practiced each and every step. They have experienced the pitfalls, the push backs, and the successes inherent with a tenacious spirit. Their experience can apply to not only other fire departments and similar paramilitary or silo-like organizations with a hierarchical culture, but also to any two organizational cultures being faced with a merger.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 examines the problem and background issue(s) giving rise to the problem as shaped by the research question.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature on organizational culture and organizational change as a whole, with a specific look at change literature emerging from within the fire service and emergency medical service professions through the National Fire Academy (NFA) at the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Also scrutinized were the findings of other researchers regarding the use of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (Covey, 1999) in other organizational change scenarios, especially fire departments. Scharmer's (2009) *Theory U* serves as the grounding theoretical lens for Covey's change paradigm alongside the Competing Values Framework (Cameron & Quinn, 2011) as the conceptual framework.

Chapter 3 presents the single case study methodology while Chapter 4 highlights the findings of this study as determined by the observations, interviews, researcher's journal, documents, and artifacts. The study is brought together in Chapter 5 through summarization, discussion, and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Three hundred years of tradition unimpeded by change.
—A firefighter colloquialism

Introduction

This literature review begins with an overview of organizational culture then shifts to literature concerning organizational change as a process. The paring of this information, along with an examination of the history of firefighting, will provide a foundation for understanding the organizational characteristics of a modern-day American fire department in light of the research question.

Pettigrew (1979) lends support for incorporating an organization's history, stating such background information provides the "purpose, commitment and order created early in the life of an organization becoming the organization's amalgam of beliefs" (p. 572), offering understanding and giving identity and expression to itself. This knowledge plays a key role in understanding the beliefs and actions of this study's fire department as it moved through a merger process.

Exploring the literature for change situations similar to other fire departments provided juxtaposition with the endeavor of the department in this study. The literature review closes with a look at the impact of S. Covey's *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (1989) as a change tool for leadership.

Organizational Culture

The study of organizational culture is considered to be a fairly new science that began to emerge as a science in the 1980s (Cameron & Quinn, 2011; Childress & Senn, 1995; Hofstede, 1986) The first mention of organizational culture in academic literature appears to have been published in a 1979 issue of *Administrative Quarterly*, titled “On Studying Organizational Cultures” by Andrew Pettigrew (Hofstede et al., 1990; Pettigrew, 1979). The field has since grown into a rich pool of information providing useful insight for scholars and practitioners as they work to understand how organizations emerge and evolve in today’s fast-paced world.

Because it is hard to specifically pinpoint what an organization’s particular culture is or why a culture manifests as it does, it often goes undetected and, sadly, unnurtured or unchecked until a crisis calls it to the forefront (Cameron & Quinn, 2011; Heifetz, 2009). When the crisis emerges, then the hard questions of what, how, and why are asked. Leadership is then called upon to examine the situation and reexamine fundamental underpinnings in an effort to understand and manage all impinging factors indicating needed change (Drucker, 1980; Kotter, 1996; Pettigrew, 1979; Schein, 1990).

Cameron and Quinn’s (2011) Competing Values Framework (CVF) categorizes organizational culture four ways: (a) The Clan Culture, wherein a sense of family is deeply rooted and leaders are sometimes seen as paternal and commitment and tradition are strong; (b) The Adhocracy Culture, wherein creative dynamics and a sense of entrepreneurialism prevail; risks are the norm; (c) The Hierarchy Culture, wherein formalized structure underpins this type of organization where long-term stability is

considered paramount; (d) The Market Culture, wherein leaders here are driven, tough, and compelling and the expectation is on competition, market penetration, and results.

Observing an organization's culture from the outside, we only see manifestations of that culture, that is, the artifacts it produces, the espoused values and beliefs held dear, and the shared assumptions of members which have developed over time that drive behavior such as in the four Competing Values Framework categories. Not being a member of a particular organizational culture does not allow for full integration or the deep understanding of subtleties and nuances of that culture because they are not our lived experience (Schein, 2010, p. 35). Therefore, this study embraces the core concept that organizational culture is that which presents itself through its organizational face as behavior, artifacts, and language.

This study examined the merging of two organizations. As such, it is important to understand Hofstede's (1986) work on small, similarly minded entities, joining together as member cultures. These member groups operate within the larger whole, influencing the organizational culture. Erez and Gati (2004) refer to these internal alliances as micro-culture(s) living within macro-cultures.

How to begin the change process in an organization, let alone leading that change, appears to be complex at best (Drucker, 1980, 1995; Michael Fullan, 2001; Heifetz, 2009; Ivancevich, 2008; Kotter, 1996; Lewin & Grabbe, 1945; Schein, 2004). Members often feel threatened when all they hold dear appears to be headed for the accounting department chopping block, or worse, that they will soon find themselves on the outside looking in (Childress & Senn, 1995; Heifetz, 2009; Kotter, 1996). Mistrust and fear permeates while a commitment from members to the hard work involved in a change

process can be difficult to find. It is easy to understand why changing an organizational culture is one of the ultimate challenges of leadership (Bennis, 1989; Greenleaf, Frick, & Spears, 1996; Kotter, 1996).

Classic change models endorse steps or stages of change such as Lewin and Grabbe's (1945) three-stage model of unfreeze, change, and refreeze. This model was later expanded, conceptually, by Schein (1989) to include emphasis on motivation and the learning/cognition of elements such as beliefs, values, assumptions, and attitudes within Lewin and Grabbe's stages. Schein's expansion of the model is most notable in the second stage, change, which Schein sees as a place of sense-making filled with learning and unlearning, and modeling and sourcing solutions as a way of gaining a sense of predictability during a time of equilibrium.

Although both Lewin and Grabbe (1945) and Schein (1989) have done a masterful job of setting forth a solid change model, the model does not adequately address the impact of a spontaneous individual human element when driving change. Their models seem to focus on the organizational whole versus the inner individual building blocks of the organization. It appears more managerially driven. Hofstede (1980) and Erez and Gati (2004), however, recognize the individual member's influence to establish and drive culture as an effective force to change the organizational culture as a whole—change the individual behavior and the culture will follow.

Schein's (1989) successful introduction of reflective learning into Lewin and Grabbe's (1945) change model of unfreeze, change, and refreeze, complements Argyris and Schön's (1974) work, the Double Loop Learning Model. Double loop learning involves individual introspection regarding a situation so as to better know the root of an

organizational problem. It also requires introspection regarding the actual chain of events leading to the situation at hand which then begs the question, “What if we had done this differently?” It posits that once the root source of a problem is determined, new behaviors can be developed so that behavior which created the problem in the first place is eliminated. In Argyris and Schön’s model, learning is a fluid state as opposed to Lewin and Grabbe’s (1945) concept of freezing behavior that appears to inhibit the deep change an organization may want as it seems to lack, on its face, the intentional reflection that deep, cyclical learning provides (Argyris, 1993, p. 244).

With each enhancement of Lewin and Grabbe’s (1945) model, there is more awareness and inclusion of the innate intuition of the organization’s member(s) reflecting on actions and events, who then come together to discover and process those situations calling for change. It is the power of “collective attention,” per Scharmer (2009, p. 31).

Theory U (Scharmer, 2009) steps away from traditional change models by giving greater due diligence to the innate human intelligence derived from lived experience(s) in organizational trenches. Similar to Argyris and Schön’s (1974) Double Loop learning model, Theory U places great emphasis on individual members observing (“seeing”) (Scharmer, 2009) all they can, downloading so to speak. This is followed by a time of retreat and reflection as individuals let go of the old and let the new (ideas, behaviors, etc.) come in to their consciousness. It is in that cognitive space, reflecting on the behavioral patterns of the past and present, of consciously sitting in the awareness which Scharmer refers to as “presencing.” Presencing is the ability to be fully present in a given moment of observing, thinking, and processing. It is that place of connection with an innate higher knowingness from which answers and solutions and the future begin to

emerge. The inability to do so may be due to the cognitive process in this place of presencing possibly being blocked by defensiveness or fear. From presencing comes the ability to co-create a new state of being which is then enacted upon and embodied in the new behaviors. Scharmer plots this newly enlightened experience through four phases known as letting awareness come, crystallizing the awareness, prototyping a strategy, and performing through new paradigms and behaviors. In other words, when we are in a place of reflective stillness, acutely aware of all that surrounds us, we can begin to identify what needs to be done and how to do it.

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People in the Literature

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People (S. Covey, 1989), a multi-year *New York Times* best-seller blending corporate thinking with modern-day self-help influence and a subtle dose of ecumenical insights, made its appearance in 1989, selling more than 25 million copies worldwide. Its genesis can be found in Covey's 1976 doctoral work which focused on moral development while emphasizing right relationships and universal spiritual principles. Since 1989, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* has gathered a cadre of corporate giants including more than two-thirds of America's Fortune 500 companies (Hillkirk, 2012; Martin, 2012).

A basic search of the academic literature did not yield the expected amount of academic research results one might expect given the age and popularity of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (S. Covey, 1989). A search of the WorldCat database revealed well over 200 citations for the various books and training videos produced by Covey. ProQuest produced 53 databases containing a large number of results consisting mostly of newspaper articles and Covey's books and professional journal articles of a general

business nature as opposed to academic writings. ProQuest for Dissertations and Theses returned no works centered on *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*.

The Center for Advanced Research (FranklinCovey) was established to centralize the findings of Covey programs implemented in corporate, educational, and governmental settings. A search of this site netted a few white papers and success stories on changing culture using the 7 Habits program (Collingwood, 2009a, 2009b).

Facilitator training videos that accompany the 7 Habits training material include a brief video about a fire department in Illinois that utilized Covey's program to improve performance. After implementing the program, this fire department was able to achieve an Insurance Services Office (ISO) rating of 1, the highest fire protection rank possible with ISO (FranklinCovey, 2005).

More Than a Phenomenon

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People (S. Covey, 1989) is well known to the fire department in this study. River City's neighbor city to the west had embraced the paradigm as their civic model in the 1990s by offering reduced tuition classes at the civic center for any citizen wishing to attend. Several major businesses and organizations, including not-for-profit organizations and schools, put leadership teams and area teens through the training, ultimately adopting *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* as their moral model. This civic endeavor captured the attention of Covey, who later wrote about the municipal miracle in his subsequent book, *Living the 7 Habits: The Courage to Change* (Covey, 1999, pp. 149-159).

How *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* Works

The 7 Habits work like pieces of a puzzle with the best results achieved when all the pieces are in place. Those who are successful in applying Stephen Covey's *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (1989), personally or professionally/corporately, are successful because they learned to master his *inside out approach* known as The Private Victory. The Private Victory encompasses the first three habits, Be Proactive, Begin with the End in Mind, and Put First Things First (S. Covey, 1989).

Habit 1—Be Proactive

The early stages of change embodied in Habit 1, Be Proactive, revolve around feelings such as, "Something is not right. I'm not happy with the way things are going." Change is wanted. With the guidance of a certified facilitator, participants intentionally and reflectively work through a series of writing and discussion-based activities. They begin to discover that their own patterns of behavior are often deeply seated in long-forgotten life scripts now manifesting as counterproductive attitudes, behaviors, and actions. These characteristics are visible to others but often unrecognized by self. Being proactive happens when the individual begins to realize they are part of the problem, need to take ownership of the problem, and need to participate in a solution process (S. Covey, 1989).

Habit 2—Begin With the End in Mind

Having achieved a foundational level of awareness and introspection, Habit 2—Begin With the End in Mind, delves deeper. It is the habit of envisioning and co-creating one's future. The first step in this habit is a simple question modified for either a single person or corporate entity. The question posed for the individual would be: If you say you

want your life to look and feel like this, why are you doing/practicing that behavior and/or maintaining that destructive relationship? For the corporate entity: If your mission and values statements say this, why are you doing that? Habit 2 requires a fearless inventory of past practices and beliefs and their origins (S. Covey, 1989).

Habit 3—Put First Things First

Habit 3—Put First Things First asks the participant to do the hard work of letting go. It is necessary to let go of destructive past practices, behaviors, thoughts, and attitudes and, if necessary, to take a stance of appropriate distance when behaviors and relationships are toxic. What remains when the negatives are properly handled, are the salvaged beginnings of a new personal or corporate paradigm. Now the reconstruction can begin. New guidelines, benchmarks, and consequences are crafted; new relationships unfold and old ones are given new boundaries. The momentum of change quickens as participants begin to realize everyone is interconnected, that the actions of one produces a ripple effect, and that no person operates in isolation (S. Covey, 1989).

These three foundational habits establish an independent internal accountability system no longer engaging in the machinations of codependency and are very much in alignment with Goleman's (1995; 1998) Emotional Intelligence theory. Habits 1, 2 and 3 are also referred to as the Private Victory.

For both the individual and corporate participants, mastery of the Private Victory results stands as a space on the change continuum where personal truth can emerge. Here, participants need to feel safe to do the hard work personal change requires. They recognize codependent behavior, openly admit error, and learn to take immediate and appropriate corrective action when necessary (S. Covey, 1989).

Habit 4—Think Win-Win

Habit 4 begins by recognizing we all negotiate our way in the world in order to achieve our goals and dreams. This habit derives its name from S. Covey's (1989) five paradigms of relationship negotiation: (a) win-lose, (b) lose-win, (c) lose-lose, (d) compromise, and (e) win-win or no deal. For example, a disagreement will typically resolve itself in either I win and you lose, or you-lose and I-win thinking or some form of compromise. Win-win thinking differs from compromise in that compromise finds one or both parties giving up something in order to move forward when, perhaps, one or both parties only does so to keep the peace. One or both parties may still harbor resentment from acquiescing. Win-Win or No Deal teaches that in the time and space of the disagreement, the parties involved are deadlocked. They decide no deal at that point in time is viable. In cases such as this, they might retreat to gather more information or simply to cool off. Win-Win, however, is achieved when both parties are comfortable and happy with their choices and that no one has felt the need to acquiesce (S. Covey, 1989).

Habit 5—Seek First to Understand Then to Be Understood

Because the presenting problem is not always the problem, Habit 5—Seek First to Understand Then to Be Understood introduces and develops the concept of empathic listening for the participant. Empathic listening requires that all personal judgments and ego be suspended when listening to others so that the listener can enter into the heart and mind of the speaker long enough to see the problem from and through their experience. It is a habit which asks participants to examine their own listening filter(s) and teaches how to reflect back what is heard for deeper understanding. It is hard work for most participants, who, for the first time, hear what is actually happening in a relationship.

This habit also teaches reconciliation and how to effectively, yet compassionately, establish accountability for all involved (S. Covey, 1989).

Habit 6—Synergize

Creating partnership, establishing trusting relationships, and reaching out to others are the foundation of Habit 6, Synergize. Synergy, in this program, is the combined effect of the individuals' efforts. It is $1+1=3$. It is the majestic sound of an orchestra comprised of many musicians playing diverse instruments. S. Covey (1989) writes in *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*:

When properly understood, synergy is the highest activity in all life—the true test and manifestation of all the other habits put together. The highest forms of synergy focus the four unique human endowments, the motive of Win/Win, and the skills of empathic communication on the toughest challenges we face in life. What results is almost miraculous. We create new alternatives—something that wasn't there before. (p. 263)

Habit 6 clears paths for participants as they begin to see how goals and visions can be achieved by acting in creative concert with others. It is a habit of building strong task teams and relationships (S. Covey, 1989).

Habit 7—Sharpen the Saw

The last habit, Habit 7—Sharpen the Saw, uses the metaphor of a woodsman trying to cut through a forest with only one saw, which he does not take the time to sharpen. This, of course, results in poor productivity and unnecessary exertion on his physical and mental processes as he continues to think that simply staying the course and working harder to compensate for the dullness of the saw will enable him to finish chopping down all the trees. Frustrated, the woodsman exhausts himself, the goal is not reached, and nothing of real value is accomplished.

This habit teaches self-renewal through mental, spiritual, emotional, and physical balance. While we easily recognize these realms in humans, we do not readily see them in corporations, but comparable realms do exist in the corporate world. In that world, these realms would be identified as: (a) the mental quality equaling the collective intellectual capacity of the organization, (b) the spiritual quality equaling the demeanor or ethical character of the organization, (c) the emotional quality equaling the corporate culture, and finally (d) the physical quality being the financial life blood and physical assets of the organization. When the body is in balance, individually or corporately, the capacity to do great things is even more powerful (S. Covey, 1989).

A Brief History of Fire Fighting

The iconic image of today's firefighter is grounded in machismo and heroism, lovingly wrapped in the admiration of an adoring public. This perception does not inoculate firefighters from imperfection; it is a high-risk profession and they are not invincible. Their level of determination to save life and property, their excellence of execution and growth as a profession, hinges on the organizational strength of their profession's vision, tenacity, and leadership.

The basic assumptions which give meaning and purpose to the profession of firefighting are found within their storied history. To understand how they might navigate the challenge of change in their world, we first need to understand their cultural genome.

The roots of American firefighting were first planted in Puritanical times in Jamestown, Virginia, 1608. Wayward sparks from a chimney landed on the thatched roof of that community's small storehouse and surrounding buildings, devastating them. Not until several other colonies suffered similar fates would it occur to the colonists to use

different building materials other than thatch roofs and wooden chimneys (D. Smith, 1978).

In 1647, Peter Stuyvesant, Governor of New Amsterdam (now New York), established a system for firefighting and maintaining the necessary firefighting equipment. It is interesting to note that part of Stuyvesant's system included homeowners and shopkeepers who were required to have their own personalized leather fire buckets, sitting in front of their homes and shops in case a fire broke out. If so, a bucket brigade was formed from the water source to the fire. The number of buckets required was based on the perceived risk of fire for any given structure.

Stuyvesant did not stop there. The new regulations and organizational structure needed management so he appointed four fire wardens tasked with monitoring the building of all structures (a precursor to our modern-day building codes) and to oversee the maintenance of New Amsterdam's firefighting equipment such as ladders, hooks, axes, and buckets. Reporting to Stuyvesant's fire wardens were teams of volunteer citizens, stalwarts who prowled the night streets carrying curiously large and obnoxiously loud wooden rattles. The sole job of this proud group, aptly dubbed the "Rattle Watch," was to patrol the village streets watching for errant chimney sparks while citizens slept. When spotted, the Rattle Watch raised a clamor with the wooden rattles, awakening everyone in the household for evacuation to the cry, "Throw out your buckets!" They would then help extinguish the blaze by quickly organizing a bucket brigade. Being part of the Rattle Watch was not a job for the faint of heart because the safety and security of all their community's meager wealth relied on their sharp eyes.

Benjamin Franklin, prolific inventor, statesman and writer, took note of this new breed of men and their drive to protect property and lives. Seeing the need for more structure in this fledgling federation, Franklin established America's first volunteer fire department in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1736. Then, as today, the thrill and skill of firefighting seized the imaginations of many townsmen who pressed town fathers for membership. Only the most highly respected gained admittance, serving as role models to the community's lesser enthused. All who were selected would eventually and affectionately come to call themselves, no matter their social standing, *the brotherhood*. The volunteer status of firefighters remained an unpaid labor of love until December 12, 1850, when the first full-time paid firefighters stepped forward to serve the citizens of Philadelphia.

As Franklin's firefighting concepts spread throughout the American colonies, history made note of the influential names counted among the ranks of volunteer firefighters. Names such as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Paul Revere, Alexander Hamilton, John Hancock, and Aaron Burr grace historic roll call rosters, alongside countless other firefighters including the 343 firefighters who gave their lives that fateful day in New York City, September 11, 2001. Such are the humble beginnings of the firefighting genome (D. Smith, 1988).

Firefighting Today

Today's firefighter is called to do more than raise a ruckus with a wooden rattle or to hurl buckets of water on a fire. Not only have they evolved to include medical first response, in today's world they are holistically engaged in and technologically connected to the fire scene; and when inside an engulfed structure, they work under a darkened veil

of smoke, usually unable to see. Modern-day structures are light years from the simple structures of colonial times. Newer, open-floor-plan structures constructed of modern materials and synthetic products mean little to no firebreaks resulting in hotter, faster fires. Not only must today's firefighters know fire suppression techniques, they must now know fire behavior when mixed with electricity, plumbing, noxious gasses, and today's flammable materials.

Dennis Smith (1988), prolific author and respected ethnographer of this profession, traveled the United States gathering the stories, passions, and insights of firefighters for his book, *Firefighters: Their Lives in Their Own Words*. In a profound passage, he records a firefighter's reflection about what it means to battle a fire amid a dark veil of smoke:

That is the part a lot of us are attracted to. There is a certain fascination with that darkness. You don't move away from it, you move toward it, and that's why firefighting is dangerous, and I think it always will be. There is that special moment where it's you against whatever is behind that darkness—it's where life and death come together. . . . Firefighting becomes a subculture, and we firefighters tend to hang around with one another, for the darkness is hard to explain to an outsider. (D. Smith, 1988, p. 300)

Fire Chief Alan V. Brunacini (2008) provides additional insight about this profession and the elusive trait which sets firefighters aside from other service-oriented occupations. In his white paper, *Fast/Close/Wet*, this seasoned firefighter and leader writes: "In fact, the basic unnatural act of running into a burning building requires a person who would subordinate their personal safety for the challenge of doing up close and very personal fire combat in a very dangerous place" (p. 4).

It is this mercurial drive deeply rooted in their firefighting DNA that keeps them responding each time the alarm sounds. It reaches out from archetypal roots when property was saved at all cost because the meager property of the colonists, perhaps a

simple cornhusk bed or a handcrafted table by a beloved family member, was all they had of value. What may in today's world seem a negligible loss, was to them financial devastation. Early firefighters took great risks to save property and thus a colony's wealth and morale and many died in the process of saving Uncle Zeb's handcrafted table (D. Smith, 1978).

Life in America now resides comfortably under a blanket of full coverage insurance, numerous rebuilding resources, and rescue/first responder options unparalleled in the history of this profession. Yet it appears from the literature on firefighting culture and training that the old paradigm of reasoning and leadership remains entrenched in the collective unconscious of their history. This old paradigm now rears its ugly head, a strong indicator of the need for change, along with other indicators such as injury and death statistics, and leadership accountability (Angulo, 2010; Sendelbach, 2009; M. L. Smith, 2000).

The shift in the type and magnitude of the impinging factors bearing down on today's fire department (e.g., changes in structure composition, advancing technology, leadership paradigms, and line-of-duty injury and death numbers) seems incongruent with available resources. Creating a new culture for a new era requires all contributing elements, positive and negative, be brought to the table for scrutiny and action. Addressing the disparity requires a new way of thinking. It requires a leadership paradigm unafraid of challenging the status quo keeping pace with 21st-century needs.

Fire Departments as Paramilitary Culture

Paramilitary is defined by the *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary and Thesaurus* ("Paramilitary," 2014) as being organized and operating like an army with two

distinctives: (a) chain of command and (b) span of control. Together, chain of command and span of control form what is referred to as unity of command. Military armies are organized by a top-down-driven chain of command. This means those in lesser ranks report to those in ranks graduating ever higher on the chain of organizational structure, responsibility, and accountability. Ranks are assigned a designation such as general, captain, major, lieutenant, officer, etc. As in a military army, those in lower ranks in a paramilitary organization do not jump rank to communicate, but rather are expected to pass needed information on up through to the next highest rank and so on until the information arrives at a level where action will occur.

The lower a firefighter is on the chain of command, the less power he possesses in the department. For example, it is not acceptable for an engineer, who is ranked just above a probie, to correct a captain, nor is it good protocol for a probie to question the actions of a firefighter. Firefighters in training are indoctrinated from day one that the fire service maintains and demands that this distinctive command structure be adhered to (Rusty, personal communication, October 15, 2008).

Figure 2 indicates the chain of command, the organizational structure, in the River City Fire Department. Not all fire departments are structured exactly like the RCFD, but may also have additional ranks inserted into the chain of command such as 1st-, 2nd-, 3rd-, and 4th-class firefighter or deputy and assistant deputy chiefs.

Span of Control

Span of control is the same system used in military organizations around the world and is the cornerstone of operations management by the United States Federal Government, National Incident Management System (NIMS). Span of control refers to

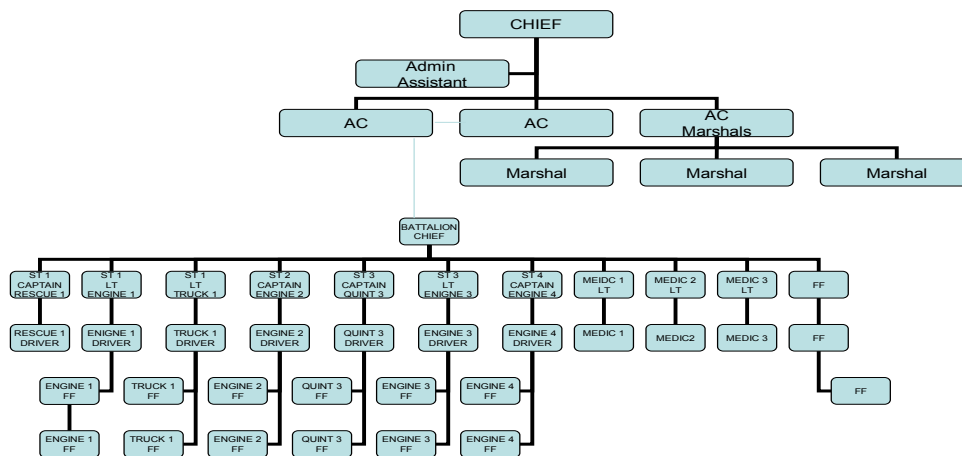


Figure 2. The chain of command in the River City Fire Department.

the concept that the number of subordinates a superior can effectively manage is five.

Subordinates can also be defined as units. For example, in the military, one superior might control the next lesser ranked officer, three subordinate units, and an administrative person for a total of five within his span of control (Vail, 2005). Fire departments use three to seven subordinates with the ideal being five, meaning that one superior controls only five subordinates. Together, chain of command and span of control form the unity of command which is based on the principle that only one reports to one.

Thomas Nelson (2005) provides an interesting view of the paramilitary design of fire departments in his article, “Leadership vs. Management: Finding the Balance.”

When we look at how the military organizes its soldiers into functional units, we see that the Armed Forces have long used the principle of span of control. . . . When viewed from a fire department perspective, the concept of span of control remains the same from a single engine response to the largest of emergency responses. (pp. 93-94)

Given the unity of command paradigm (i.e., chain of command and span of control), it is easy to see how difficult it would be for new ways of thinking to take root, organically vs. through a direct command, especially from the lower ranks. To allow such thinking in paramilitary environments requires a special brand of leadership.

The Problem in the Firefighting Culture

Fire Chief Rick Lasky (2006), a highly respected speaker, journal contributor, and author regarding the need for change in ethics, values, and principles within today's firefighting organizations, has much to say on building a fire department leadership that can create an environment for cultural change without losing all that is good about the unity of command model. He calls for increased accountability at all levels and for a rekindling of a professional passion for excellence.

River City Fire Department's leadership team sees Lasky as a prophetic voice calling for change in the existing philosophical and operational paradigms. Lasky's work motivated River City Fire Department's Chief Foster to realize it was "time for us to move away from traditional paramilitary roots for the sake of keeping up with changes in technology, society and homeland security issues" (D. Foster, personal communication, November 10, 2006).

Driving Forces

Leadership in the fire service plays a major role in nurturing a climate of safety within and around their dangerous profession; this focus includes both firefighters and emergency medical services. The National Fallen Firefighters Foundation (NFFF, 2004) developed a target-specific program entitled, Everyone Goes Home. The mission of this program is to enhance and standardize policies, procedures, and practices within the

profession. The vision is to reduce error, injury, and death in the line of duty with the goal that everyone goes home at the end of their shift. These initiatives are designed to bring cohesion to department management and to encourage all firefighters to have a voice in the overall development of their respective departments.

Guiding the Everyone Goes Home initiative are multiple drivers known as The 16 Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives (NFFF, 2004). They are:

1. Define and advocate the need for a cultural change within the fire service relating to safety; incorporating leadership, management, supervision, accountability and personal responsibility.
2. Enhance the personal and organizational accountability for health and safety throughout the fire service.
3. Focus greater attention on the integration of risk management with incident management at all levels, including strategic, tactical, and planning responsibilities.
4. All firefighters must be empowered to stop unsafe practices.
5. Develop and implement national standards for training, qualifications, and certification (including regular recertification) that are equally applicable to all firefighters based on the duties they are expected to perform.
6. Develop and implement national medical and physical fitness standards that are equally applicable to all firefighters, based on the duties they are expected to perform.
7. Create a national research agenda and data collection system that relates to the initiatives.
8. Utilize available technology wherever it can produce higher levels of health and safety.

9. Thoroughly investigate all firefighter fatalities, injuries, and near misses.
10. Grant programs should support the implementation of safe practices and/or mandate safe practices as an eligibility requirement.
11. National standards for emergency response policies and procedures should be developed and championed.
12. National protocols for response to violent incidents should be developed and championed.
13. Firefighters and their families must have access to counseling and psychological support.
14. Public education must receive more resources and be championed as a critical fire and life safety program.
15. Advocacy must be strengthened for the enforcement of codes and the installation of home fire sprinklers.
16. Safety must be a primary consideration in the design of apparatus and equipment.

These initiatives can be categorized in the following manner: organizational culture change (initiatives 1 and 4), standardized/best practices (initiatives 3, 5, 6, 7, 11, and 12), support (initiatives 8, 13, and 14), and safety (initiatives 2, 9, 10, 15, and 16) (NFFF, 2004).

While all of the Everyone Goes Home initiatives are important to the River City Fire Department, their current leadership efforts revolve around two: (a) define and advocate the need for a cultural change within the fire service relating to safety;

incorporating leadership, management, supervision, accountability, and personal responsibility; and (b) all firefighters must be empowered to stop unsafe practices.

Putting First Things First: Creating Change Through Leadership

Beer and Nohria (2000) in their work, *Cracking the Code of Change*, claim that 70% of all change initiatives fail. However, the critical elements needed for a successful organizational paradigm shift, as cited by Beer and Nohria, are present, although perhaps not all active, in the River City Fire Department. Beer and Nohria's elements of change are: (a) a clear and compelling need for change, (b) a clear and compelling vision of the future, (c) a strategic change plan in process, (d) an even distribution of tasks involved in the change process, (e) empowerment and cooperation from top management, (f) ownership and across the board accountability at all levels, and (f) open, clear, and non-judgmental communication processes.

The common thread interwoven through both Beer and Nohria's (2000) work and S. Covey's (1989) *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* is establishing a structured reflective practice as part of the change process. Both works, along with other adult learning theorists, indicate that individuals, the building blocks of an organization, cannot be proactive, begin with the end in mind, have a clear and compelling vision for the future, design a strategic change plan or model an open, clear, and non-judgmental communication process without reflecting on what has occurred before. Intentional, structured change requires a whole new set of learning skills and, for adults, this includes reflective practice and guided conversation about those reflections (Knowles, Holton III, & Swanson, 2005; Kolb, 1983; Merriam, Rosemary, & Baumgartner, 2007; Scharmer, 2009; Senge, 1999).

Noting that change is more circular than linear, Michael Fullan (2005) in his book, *Leadership and Sustainability Systems: Thinkers in Action*, thinks along similar lines with Kegan and Lahey's (2001) work regarding the power of specific types of conversations as indicators of change, which, as in the case of the RCFD, would be a move from a conversation of blame to one of accountability as it circles around a viable conclusion. Fullan (2005) notes their three key observations: (a) it is very hard to bring about significant changes in any human group without changes in individual behaviors, (b) it is hard to sustain significant changes in behavior without significant changes in individuals' underlying meanings that may give rise to their behaviors, and (c) it is very hard to lead on behalf of other people's changes in their underlying ways of making meaning without considering the possibility that we ourselves must also change (Kegan & Lahey, 2001, p. 3). Fullan (2005) sees this as "accountability and capacity building" as the organization matures into new awareness and understanding.

When asked about the broad base appeal of the 7 Habits, Covey responded that his work was simply based in the common sense most are born with and "our inner desire to do the right thing, the right way, but unfortunately, common sense is not always common practice. 7 Habits puts us back on a right path one step at a time beginning with our self. That's how you change an organization" (S. R. Covey, personal communication, May 12, 2010).

Kotter (1996), whether intentional or not, provides an overlay to S. Covey's (1989) work by giving the change process more corporate-focused language versus Covey's personal language in his eight steps for change. They are:

1. Establishing a sense of urgency

2. Creating the guiding coalition
3. Developing a vision and a strategy
4. Communicating the change vision
5. Empowering broad-based action
6. Generating short-term wins
7. Consolidating gains and producing more change
8. Anchoring new approaches in the culture (Kotter, (1996)).

It is interesting to note Lewin and Grabbe's (1945) and Schein's (1989) influence in both Covey's and Kotter's work. All four theorists posit that for change to begin, there must be open recognition that current practices and behaviors are damaging to the organization, that new behaviors and attitudes must be considered and enacted. Further, anchoring new successful behaviors for the long term happens when new behaviors and attitudes are consistently reinforced at both the personal and organizational levels.

Summary

In this chapter I have reviewed multiple change theorists whose work contains threads of S. Covey's principles of the 7 Habits. Within their own theories they point to: (a) individuals as building blocks of an organization, (b) that the performance quality of an individual and thus the organization is in alignment with the self-awareness of the individual, (c) that through personal and organizational moral inventories ineffective practices and behaviors can be identified and eliminated, and (d) through diligence and strong accountability practices, new, more productive behaviors and attitudes can be achieved.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Firefighting's own literature has identified the firefighting culture as a significant factor when addressing a critical need to change in order to meet the new demands in the 21st century (Barnes, 1998; Bruncini, 2008; Childs, 2005; Freedman, 1998; Putnam, 2001; Sendelbach, 2009; D. Smith, 1988; M. L. Smith, 2000). Their dilemma lies in how to extract the best practices from a culture steeped in tradition with the current need for a lean, sharp, technologically advanced fire department ready to meet the growing challenges of a fire-based emergency medical response model emerging in the 21st century.

Research Design

The framework for this research is a qualitative single case study examining the ways in which a specific corporate leadership tool, Stephen R. Covey's (1989) *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, influenced cultural change within the River City Fire Department. The study is bounded by time and place, to wit, 2007-2013 and within one organization, thus meeting the criteria of a bounded system as defined by Creswell (2007, p. 73). Further, Yin (2009) also notes that a single case design is "eminently justified" if it is a rare or unusual situation, is representative of other similar situations, and would serve as a revelation.

Context of the Study

This study is set in a vibrant Midwestern community of just over 55,000 citizens, home to the River City Fire Department. The River City Fire Department was chosen for this study because they were willing, through their trusted relationship with the local college, to allow an outsider to observe and document the changes taking place as a result of their merger process.

Nestled on the banks of a scenic recreational river, River City is picturesque and complete with well-maintained public parks and manicured neighborhoods. This tranquil community boasts well-established public and private schools and a new state-of-the-art hospital that is supported by a broad-based medical community. Technologically advanced and world-renowned companies blend well with smaller family-owned business in this growing community.

Founded in 1847, River City also boasts the largest retail center north of the state capital along with a nationally recognized liberal arts Christian college. With strong religious ties among her citizens, River City welcomes religious and ethnic diversity. Traditional Christian churches peacefully co-exist with Hindu and Muslim houses of worship, while growing Hispanic communities take root among meticulously manicured Italian and Belgian blue collar neighborhoods established in the early 20th century. Violent crime is low. With unabashed pride and devotion, River City touts its motto, “The Best Hometown in America.”

The River City Fire Department

The River City Fire Department, founded in 1904, has 106 members working out of four station houses which function on an annual operating budget of \$9,156,077. It is

important to note that in its 107 years of operation, the River City Fire Department has experienced only one line-of-duty death in 1906.

The Department organizationally breaks down as follows: 1 Chief, 3 Assistant Chiefs, 4 Battalion Chiefs, 15 Captains, 15 Lieutenants, 3 Fire Inspectors, 9 Paramedics, 30 Driver Operators, 18 Master Firefighters, 15 First Class Firefighters and 1 full-time administrative assistant. The average age of an RCFD firefighter is 37. It is also important to note that one of the cross-trained firefighter/emergency medical technicians is a female. Hers is the first such appointment in the Department's history.

The RCFD has an impressive history of innovative thinking as exemplified by their strong community educational safety programming for children, which welcomes over 5,100 school children per year to the Survive Alive House and Little Red interactive lifesaving programs. Launched in 1984, Survive Alive House was the first of its kind in the nation. It enjoyed such resounding success that fire departments around the nation have adopted this unique educational program.

The River City Fire Department responds to an approximately 6,425 calls per year, an average of just over 18 calls per day. Eighty-two percent of those calls are medical-assistance-only calls. This sharp uptick in the type of calls received through the city's 911 emergency response center (more medical than fire), and budget concerns, prompted a decision by the City Fathers on January 1, 2003, to merge the Emergency Medical Service (EMS) with the Fire Department. This move required cross-training between the two professions, firefighter and emergency medical technician (EMT), so that all calls would be responded to with appropriately trained personnel.

However, it is its structure and culture dating back to a 300-year-old firefighting genome that creates a challenging situation. Juxtaposed to the storied history of firefighting, the emergency medical response profession, as a cultural entity and contributing element to this study, did not come into the American public's awareness or solidify as an organization in its own right until 1972 when it was made popular by the NBC primetime television series, *Emergency!* The show ended in 1977, but not after having inspired thousands to become emergency medical technicians (EMTs). In the process, *Emergency!* gave birth to a new professional field with its own underlying beliefs, values, and assumptions (JEMS, 2010). While not anticipated at the time the merger was signed into effect, the move brought about additional department strain as two distinct cultures, the firefighters and the emergency medical technicians (paramedics), were melded into one functioning entity.

River City Fire Department's Mission and Values

Prior to adopting the 7 Habits as a training tool, the River City Fire Department used their mission statement as their integrity guide. It states: "The Fire Department provides an appropriate, safe, and professional response to fire, medical, and environmental emergencies. The department is dedicated to minimizing the loss of life and property through suppression, rescue, education, code enforcement, investigation, and other programs."

As a result of the department's 2006 initial training in *The 7 Habits for Highly Effective People* (S. Covey, 1989), the RCFD created this list of values to stand alongside their mission statement:

1. We provide public safety services to the citizens of River City.

2. We value these citizens as well as River City's history and tradition.
3. We treat others with compassion and kindness at all times.
4. We display high levels of professionalism, integrity, honesty, and dedication in the performance of our duties.
5. We are a group of highly skilled, motivated, and passionate people working together as a team.

Data Collection

In August of 2010, Phase 1 of the research for this study, collection of existing data, began. During Phase 1, general data from six sources within the department were examined: (a) Standard Operating Guidelines (SOGs), (b) meeting notes, (c) Insurance Services Office (ISO) ratings, (d) artifacts, (e) researcher's journal, and (f) history of the fire suppression and emergency medical services merger in 2002.

From 2007 to 2011, multiple training workshops were held to identify and strategically plan around three core issues for the members of this fire department. Those concerns were: (a) creating unity as a result of the merger and disintegrating/negatives attitudes between shifts and stations, (b) promoting the buy-in to changes resulting from the merger, and (c) rebuilding their structure, meaning they had few accurate job descriptions, unclear boundaries, rules and regulations, and a set of outdated standard operating guidelines (SOGs).

These workshops represented the first time in the department's history that the entire leadership team, including union leadership, gathered in one place, rank checked at the door, in order to come together to learn a new way of handling old problems. The

strategic planning workshops continued in May, August, and September of 2007 with accountability meetings interspersed throughout the year, continuing yet today.

Phase 2, interviews with key individuals and focus groups, was approved on June 10, 2013, by Andrews University IRB.

Standard Operating Guidelines (SOGs)

These are living documents outlining policy and procedures for every conceivable contingency involved in operating a fire department, spanning administration to job performance and professional conduct. SOGs are living documents, updated or created as need arises. SOGs enacted by the River City Fire Department prior to 2007 provided a comprehensive picture of the culture and day-to-day practices in this organization prior to the change endeavor. SOGs on file at the end of 2012 documented the change process at that point in time.

Meeting Notes

Meeting notes from leadership accountability meetings established after the department's 7 Habits training, documented leaderships' endeavors to create a more responsive leadership team and develop a more functioning accountability system with appropriate consequences known to all involved.

Insurance Services Office Ratings

Ratings from the Insurance Service Office (ISO) are a critical, unbiased benchmark for understanding a fire department's effectiveness—a report card, so to speak. ISO ratings are assessed annually on all American fire departments. The highest possible score is 1 and the lowest 10. Ten percent of a department's overall rating is

based on the department's communication system such as dispatch response time and communication on the fire ground. Fifty percent of the score is assessed on amount, quality, and dispersion of all equipment given the area served, along with the records of each department. The remaining 40% of the ISO rating assesses the amount of water available to the fire department should the largest possible fire erupt within its jurisdiction. It is interesting to note that prior to the change initiative, the ISO rating for this department was 4.

As an integral point of triangulation, this study examined the River City Fire Department's pre- and post-study ISO ratings.

Artifacts

Local newspaper articles about the RCFD, along with their written and photographic departmental archives, will infuse this study with added insights to their culture.

Researcher's Journal

My notes regarding thoughts, observations, and questions throughout the process of gathering data, interviewing, and processing for the final product will help the connective process throughout.

Sample and Interviews

Twenty-three semi-structured individual interviews were conducted for this study. The interviews self-selected into the interview process in response to an invitation letter sent to all members of the River City Fire Department (see Appendix B). Of those responding, 20 were interviewed individually while three were interviewed as a focus

group representing members with 3 years or less service with the RCFD (S. B. Merriam, 2002; Tuckett, 2004).

Three interviews addressed the *why* behind change initiative through the lived experiences of the fire chief, the mayor at the time the change process started, and the current mayor who was a city council member at the time and who continued to support the fire department's leadership initiative after his mayoral election.

Two interviews centered on the two firefighters who took their change plan to their chief and who were, despite their rank at the time, empowered by the chief to drive the change process forward.

Two interviews were given by the department's training officer regarding training for the change process and the emergency medical services (EMS) chief who provided the perspective of the EMS staff during the merger.

The remaining interviews with various ranking members of the RCFD, from both fire suppression and EMS, round out the remaining perspectives of the organization's rank and file members concerning the merger.

Data Analysis

Patton (2002) clarifies the inductive analytical process in a qualitative study: "Inductive analysis means that the patterns, themes, and categories of analysis come from the data; they emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis" (p. 306). Therefore, coding is used to bring order to the interviews and focus groups.

Saldaña (2009) posits coding is a process that "symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute" to the data in order to sift and filter

what the researcher hears into manageable categories. In this study, during the interview process, for example, several comments may be disclosed by each participant, in varying ways, that speak to a similar theme such as frustration or desire to serve. Frustration and desire to serve then become categories under which other similar comments can be codified as the interviews are processed.

Typically, enough codes are assigned so as to create groupings of similar codes which can then be sorted into subcategories, which helps reduce or confine the data into more manageable pieces. Saldaña (2009) likens the establishing of these broader categories to a title on a book; the title hints at what is inside. The coding process, therefore, brings order and insight to both the subtle and direct aspects of the spoken word or images study participants use to relate their lived experiences. It is described in Saldaña's work as "making the invisible obvious" (p. 149).

Trustworthiness

Padgett (1998) endorses six specific checks and balances to ensure robust research. They are: (a) triangulation, (b) peer debriefing and support, (c) member checking, (d) negative case analysis, (e) auditing, and (f) prolonged engagement. Data analysis in this study is anchored in four of the six points: (a) triangulation, (b) peer debriefing, (c) member checking, and (d) prolonged engagement.

Triangulation

Interviews, documentation, and observations, triangulated around similar themes, were revealed through a coding process (see Figure 3). Triangulation served to strengthen the trustworthiness of the interviewee's comments by: (a) guarding against or indicating

when personal retaliatory comments were given and (b) serving as additional validation to comments and claims made during the interview process (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Gubrium & Holstein, 2002; Saldana, 2009).

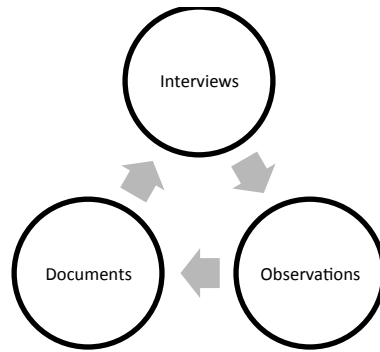


Figure 3. Study triangulation points.

Peer Debriefing and Support

Drawing upon the combined wisdom and years of experience with other doctoral studies and staying in close communication with my committee as this study moved through various stages provided much needed feedback in terms of moving forward or stepping back to review or correct a part of the process.

Member Checking

Interviews played an integral role in data collection of this work. Members of the River City Fire Department were provided with interview transcript drafts for review, ensuring I heard, understood, and documented their words correctly. In the final written draft stage, several members reviewed all other chapters to ensure the complex layers of their experience aligned correctly with the research foundation concerning their change efforts. Members of the Department were available at any time for any questions

concerning their departmental documentation and artifacts, cultural practices, and beliefs. Additionally, the prolonged engagement aspect of this study provided that members of this fire department were available at any time for any questions concerning departmental documentation and artifacts, history, cultural practices, and beliefs for about 7 years.

Ethics

The Andrews University IRB granted approval for Phase 1 of this study, collection of existing data, on August 25, 2010, assigning it Protocol Number 10-069. Phase 2, the interviews, was assigned Protocol Number 13-095 on June 10, 2013.

Every consideration has been given to maintain the confidentiality of the information used in this study. No printed departmental materials or artifacts left the control of the River City Fire Department unless permission was granted by the Chief and/or Mayor. All written drafts of this study were shredded and disposed of. All completed writings and original interview recordings are now stored in a secured location deemed appropriate by River City's Mayor with a duplicate set of written documents stored in a locked file cabinet in my office per the 3-year time limit prescribed by Andrews University.

All participants in this study selected or were assigned a pseudonym for use throughout. The town served by this fire department and the fire department have also been assigned a pseudonym.

These protective measures will remain in place for a period of 3 years per Andrews University's IRB regulations.

Generalizability

Eisner (1998) asserts that we do not necessarily learn everything we need to know firsthand and that one of the most useful forms of learning occurs vicariously when we are able to relate to the experiences of others in the form of stories, images, and precepts. While this study focuses on one particular type of organization with a unique culture and mission, it serves as a prism through which the various characteristics of most organizations can view their structures such as leadership, policies, organizational politics, training and development, course correction, succession planning, and intrinsic reward. It is the reader who generalizes the findings to their own environment.

Through the lived experiences of these firefighters, this study explored the leadership challenges that an organization faced if merger efforts were not successful—challenges such as unresolved territorial issues, power struggles, emotional collateral, and organizational potential stymied by fear of change and possible retaliatory action. Further, what was learned, and is still being learned in this organization are global concerns, applicable to any organization in a state of change, for example, how to successfully blend past best practices with the newly developed policies and procedures; how to develop and recast members, make course corrections, embed accountability and reward progress. As the reader reads these experiences, they will be able to generalize concepts, skills and images to their own environment.

CHAPTER 4

MERGING TWO ORGANIZATIONS

I think the title of this whole thing should be patience, just be patient. —Rusty

Introduction

In the summer of 2013, seven years after their leadership initiative started, 23 members of varying rank in the River City Fire Department, along with the past and present mayors of River City, stepped forward to tell the story of their fire department finding itself faced with two options after the organization was merged with the city's emergency medical services in 2003. The options were: (a) Continue to allow infighting resulting from the merger to drag them into obsolescence or, (b) Move forward and venture into a new leadership paradigm emerging from an unlikely source. They chose the latter. Their story answers the research question: How did Covey's *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (S.Covey, 1989) inform the organizational change process during the merging of fire suppression and emergency medical services (EMS) in one Midwestern state fire department during the years 2007 to 2013?

Part I begins with an overview of the impinging factors influencing the setting and environment that gave rise to the problem this department faced. A review of key factors such as a phenomenon known as *the brotherhood* of firefighters and the back story of the RCFD's prior labor agreement provides foundational insight into the organization's culture. Last, information regarding the fire-based EMS response model

trending across the nation provides further understanding about the complex situation this fire department found itself in when merged with emergency medical services.

Part II examines the mandate in light of unanticipated problems that arose, leadership's response to the problems, and the organizational anxiety those problems versus the response created.

Part III introduces two rank-and-file (at the time) firefighters emerging as unexpected leaders with a plan to help the organization move forward. This section examines the journey and process the River City Fire Department experienced as everyone worked through the difficult and often painful times inherent to organizational change.

Part IV concludes with the perspective of our two leadership protagonists, Brad and Rusty, their chief, and the two mayors involved during the course of this study. Also shared are the insights of a new generation of firefighter, Millennials, hired after the 7 Habits training and merger ruckus subsided and a retirement wave took place. Some of these Millennials hold post-secondary degrees in fire science or business management, some have military experience; all are cross trained within the emergency medical response system. Their mixed skill set uniquely positions them to carry the baton of leadership forward.

Part I: In the Beginning

Most of their stories are similar. Many members of the River City Fire Department are second generation and, in some cases, third or more generation firefighters. Some seemingly stumbled into this career only to realize later that life has a way of putting us right where we need to be. Some were greatly influenced in their youth

by a family firefighter or by one who allowed them to explore the neighborhood fire station. Another tells of how he watched helplessly as firefighters worked to save his father's life. Sadly, his father passed away that day leaving behind an 11-year-old vowing that no child should ever witness such a scene.

But, no matter how their careers started, all those interviewed expressed feelings similar to those of their firefighting brother, Battalion Chief Conner, who said, "I come from an environment of 40 guys who are here not because they have to be, but because they want to be. It always blew my mind that someone could love their work as much as this." This feeling that they are all part of something greater than themselves, the brotherhood, was evident as each stepped forward to tell the story of finding their way through a divisive situation together.

Such feelings aren't exclusive to the River City Fire Department. The tie that binds them with their firefighting brothers and sisters worldwide is legendary. While it is difficult to put into words the depth and scope of what that brotherhood is, it is easy to identify in action. America got her first real glimpse of it on 9/11 as terrorists attacked the Twin Towers in New York City. Without hesitation, hundreds of firefighters rushed into that burning hell to save the thousands of individuals inside. In their quest to save the victims and to support the efforts of their firefighting brothers and sisters, 343 of them did not return.

To follow each other into such dire situations knowing full well they may never come out is the essence of the brotherhood. It is solidified in the poignant photographs and stories of firefighters from that fateful September day years ago; yet it is as endearing

as the story Captain Snyder tells of his first day on the job. He broke his leg trying to connect a hose to a hydrant on the fireground.

Oh! I felt so bad! But that being said, the guys came and visited me. I was brand new and I know they thought I was dumber than a box of rocks but I could sense they still cared about me and that I was one of ‘em. It kind of reminded me of the service in a way—that it’s a brotherhood and everybody had each other’s back. I knew I was in the right place and where I belonged.

With a passion sealed and delivered through generations, they have stood shoulder to shoulder in the brotherhood, passing their love of this profession down to their sons and daughters. Understanding that bond helps explain the early reactions and subsequent journey the RCFD traveled when their city council and mayor mandated them to change their 106-year-old operating paradigm, and thus their culture, by merging with city’s Emergency Medical Services Department (EMS), a young profession with a 40-year history.

Until 2003, the design of the River City Fire Department allowed for them to be staffed, prepared, and equipped to handle, if need be, the largest fire River City could possibly experience. Firefighters worked with but were separate from the city’s emergency medical response system even though the two entities performed similar life-saving measures. While the number of fire suppression calls was declining, the number of emergency medical calls was rapidly rising to approximately 83% of their 911 call volume. Seeing the handwriting on the wall, the firefighters looked for ways to stay relevant as the need for fire suppression calls dropped.

The dramatic spike in medical emergency calls nationwide outpaced the number of available emergency medical technicians (EMTs), a situation being felt in River City. Much like the gap created in America during the early days of automobiles when the creation of a safe roadway system lagged behind the rapidly increasing number of

automobiles on the road, the emergency medical services in River City felt the growing pains of a new era of emergency response services they struggled to meet. As a result of the struggle, shift hours for EMTs in River City were extended to meet the increased call volume. Demand and hours added up faster than could be safely staffed with limited personnel, resulting in burnout and major health problems.

Adding further stress on the already beleaguered EMT team was the low pay scale in River City as opposed to neighboring municipalities. The high-stress, low-pay reputation created a poor recruiting climate for EMS leadership. Recruiting shortages worried leadership as they watched their annual recruiting pool dwindle from 50 to 12, according to River City's EMS chief. This unbalanced workload and low compensation environment resulted in many recruits training in River City, then transferring to other municipalities once certified. Realizing they were going to need significant help to correct the situation, representatives of the Emergency Medical Services Department approached city and fire leadership with a preliminary merger plan. They hoped their plan would provide a ready pool of support by cross training with firefighters plus give them the opportunity to participate in a better compensation package. In turn, firefighters would have the opportunity to cross train at advanced levels with EMS, greatly enhancing their mission of providing world-class service to River City's citizens.

The idea of a merger spurred River City's city council to conduct a study in order to gain insight regarding how to best address it without losing quality of service and still keep within budget parameters. According to River City's former mayor, the study confirmed a large area of training and services overlaps between fire suppression and EMS, making them an obvious choice for consolidation. The move also aligned with

forthcoming budget cutbacks. From a fiscal standpoint, property tax caps voted in several years prior now required prudent management of project budgets and a paradigm shift regarding how city services would be managed. Because the fire department would also benefit from a merger, the plan seemed a win-win all around. With little debate, the merger was signed into effect in 2003.

Part II: Merger Logistics Creates a Crisis

In 2003, the firefighter pension board comprised representation from fire service management, the firefighters' union local, city officials, and a retired firefighter. (Because firefighter pension fund regulations state only firefighters and city officials may manage the firefighters' pension fund, representation was present from the Emergency Medical Services Department was not involved.) This group created and oversaw the logistics of the merger and worked with the Chief to rebalance the workloads. The plan was to eventually phase out the existing Emergency Medical Services Department and change the employment requirements for the fire service to include prior emergency medical technician (EMT) experience. All future hires would then fall under the RCFD pay structure and pension plan, considered the better of the two pensions.

For the firefighters in 2003, the state pension fund, the Public Employees Retirement Fund (PERF) 1977, simply known as The 77 Fund, was the foundational component of the River City firefighter employment package. This benefit package, plus a series of employment suitability tests comprised of physical agility and strength tests, was the employment distinctive between fire suppression and the EMS. Many RCFD applicants fail the physical fire suppression test. Specific portions are comprised of crawling along a hose line in a blackened-out room while wearing a full face mask, the

test for claustrophobia; or pulling a charged 2½-inch hose line 75 feet and pulling a 1¾-inch 150-foot dry line, tests of physical strength and endurance; and climbing a fully extended 150-foot ariel ladder, the test of acrophobia. Passing the full spectrum of tests is a mark of pride and honor, a rite of passage for any applicant wanting to be called a firefighter.

Without EMS representation in the design of the merger, moving everyone into a single department pension plan proved difficult when it came time to address concerns about critical points in the migration, points that arose after the fact. Two significant issues for EMS were: (a) number of years on the job required for retirement and long-term disability differed between fire and EMS, and (b) the physical requirements for EMS to matriculate to the fire department. It is the process of merging the existing EMS employees into the fire department and thus into the 77 Fund that lies at the core of the organizational discord, discord that held the merger process hostage for several years.

River City's only female cross-trained fire fighter/paramedic was one who got caught in the new testing standards crossfire established by the Pension Board. Her story harkens to a time in the RDFD when the presence of a woman in a male-dominated profession and culture was not fully, or openly, appreciated. Her interview is filled with stories only a trailblazing pioneer can tell. When asked about her experience trying to cross over into the RCFD pension fund from EMS, her voice filled with what could only be described as "determined grit."

Being in the 77, I would be able to retire sooner. There were 2 people on the pension board who, of course, didn't want women on the job and their physical agility test was designed to keep women off the job—but it was from 1985 not that it was OK then but it was a little more acceptable I would guess. And kind of like the Paula Deen thing going on—it happened, not that it was all right then, but it was more tolerated. At the time—you know Bobby?—his stature is short you

know and me being a girl—‘cause Bobby was fittin’ to do it, too. They didn’t want us on the job because they said we couldn’t do it. . . . It took 2 years and we had to have a legal battle that was drawn out—there was 5 of us that wanted to go into the 77 pension and we had to have lawyers from Capital City and we had to have a special committee set up because those 2 on the pension board wanted us to go through the 22 steps—or 17—I don’t remember what the number is that a new person coming in would do. We were saying we already had certain tests to do before we could be hired on EMS. So after they formed this committee, they came up that . . . there were things that equaled—like for endurance. Their endurance was to pull a charged hose line which is something you never do on a scene anyways and that’s how some of their things were thrown out because those things are supposed to be equal to what a person would normally do on a fire ground. You *never* pull a charged line by yourself. . . . So, basically everything we did, they were able to cross out. So all we had to do was a blind crawl and a ladder crawl for claustrophobia and heights and then we were able to get back in. But, because they were such asses about it, I lost 2 yrs on my time and we were told that we would be able to buy years so we wouldn’t have to do the full 20, so I ended up having—I have 6 yrs in that pension and I don’t know what I’m going to do with it because it doesn’t go in, we couldn’t buy it after all—so I have to start the 20 years all over. I will have been here 26 years when I retire.

Move to Fire Pension Causes Organizational Problems

Under the RCFD’s 77 Fund, a person would be fully vested after 20 years of service and could retire at 50% of their benefits, or they could choose to max out their service at 32 years and draw 74% of their benefits. Should they become injured on the job and no longer able to work as a firefighter, their disability benefit was a set amount to be paid out for life.

Under the EMS civilian retirement plan, one’s age and years of service had to total 85 in order to begin drawing on full benefits. Their disability benefits were financially less and time bound, meaning benefits would not pay out for life. However, in the merger’s fine print, one point many felt was not clearly communicated was that a move from EMS to the RCFD, by current EMS employees, meant the starting point for years of service would be rolled back to 1 no matter how many existing years of service in EMS. The Pension Board anticipated a future time when everyone would hire in to the

fire department and a separate EMS department would be no more. Their offer to switch pension plans was presented as a one-time-now-or-never-sign-on-the-bottom-line-or-lose-it offer to existing EMS employees. Organizational problems began to surface once the realization hit the EMS rank and file that they would not automatically matriculate into the 77 Plan, nor were there plans to buy out their existing individual pension plans.

For some, migrating over meant their years of existing service in EMS could be voided and the clock rolled back to Day 1; a matter of personal sacrifice to be individually determined if transferring over. For others, their age in 2003 meant another 20 years of service would put them well past any point of having a meaningful retirement or even of being of full physical value to the fire department. Not being able to migrate via this path produced emotional feelings of abandonment and of being disrespected for their years of service and/or because they could not take the financial loss due to their age.

What started out on paper to be a simple merger of one department with another had turned into an organizational nightmare. The situation left many on the EMS side feeling as though they had become victims of a bait-and-switch maneuver when it was realized existing employees could not participate in the better retirement plan and that only new hires would be eligible. Unclear communications from the Pension Board to organizational members about the process created feelings of unfairness complete with lawsuits on both sides. EMS Chief Tyndale shared his observations regarding the pension board:

That group really blocked anyone getting into the pension and I think a lot of animosity really grew out of that. A lot of the “us and them” really came from that side of things to the point where both sides had lawyers, and the fighting and arbitrations caused a lot of things. And not that the city didn’t help and could

have, but there was a lot of finger pointing and us and them. If we had to do it over, that's the biggest point of contention right there.

It was estimated by River City officials that the cost to buy out and incorporate all the EMS pension plans so that none would have to make hard decisions regarding the quality of their retirement life would cost approximately \$1.7 million. This expenditure was quickly vetoed. With no cogent alternative financial plan to ease the situation, such as a buy-out over time, the Pension Board turned the situation over to the Board of Public Works and Safety, the entity responsible for overseeing the hiring and conduct of police and fire employees in River City. The Board of Public Works and Safety moved on to the second phase of bringing the EMS into the fire service by securing the services of a specialist in Capital City to create a physical agility equivalency test for EMS employees. The equivalency test covered approximately a dozen job-specific core skills a fire fighter must be proficient in and that are different from skills used by EMS (e.g., climbing up a 105-foot ladder, raising a fan, and performing a blind crawl). Some EMTs were able to easily achieve passing marks but, again, due to either age or physical restrictions, some were not able to pass. This created divisive feelings within the EMS division between those who were able to pass all the tests and could financially make the move versus those who could not, for whatever reason.

For some firefighters, the physical equivalency test created for the EMS was an affront to their sensibilities regarding what it took and meant to become a firefighter. As one sarcastically said during his interview: "So you gotta do 10 push-ups and 15 pull-ups and climb the ladder and that makes you a fireman?" For others, an institutional memory lingered from some 30 years prior when River City firefighters fought hard in contract negotiations, which resulted in the foundation for the retirement plan they now enjoyed.

A second-generation firefighter recalled with pride how his father placed his career on the line during the negotiation battle for the retirement plan. In his estimation, the prevailing sentiment in the RCFD in the early days of the merger was that to so lightly allow those they considered *civilians*, the EMS, to enjoy the benefits of that long ago hard-fought negotiation created a stumbling block for many of the older members of the department. They were not willing to share the spoils of their hard-won victory.

Comments were consistent among interviewees who felt the merger was not well thought out and that it was a merger on paper only, held hostage by resentment and frustration. Two separate organizations were still present; two separate leaderships and two budgets remained. Frustration ran high. Many pointed to poor planning and poor communication throughout the process as the reason the situation appeared to be out of control. Some pointed to political motivations and personal agendas; most lost faith in their leadership team. As one paramedic noted, “We were one department by t-shirt only.”

Leadership’s Response to the Conflict

The leadership of the River City Fire Department knew they had issues to resolve, but with limited administrative staff, tackling those heated issues in addition to managing the day-to-day functions of the department proved to be overwhelming; progress was slower than anticipated. While there were those who actively worked toward a complete and healthy merger, certain factions held tight to their negative feelings, hindering progress. Passive-aggressive behavior began to surface as an if-you-want-it-done-do-it-yourself attitude or worse.

Acknowledging in his interview that negative thinking and passive-aggressive actions were happening in the fire stations, one chief noted, “I think it was worse in the field. The ones who had negative attitudes would find ways to irritate each other . . . but patient care was never impacted.” There are those who would disagree and felt that negative attitudes and behaviors displayed while on calls affected the overall quality of patient care simply by being less than professional while out in public. Pointing to a couple of examples when feelings of “us and them” did manifest on calls, one EMT told of a firefighter intentionally pushing a door into him, knocking him down while entering to retrieve a patient from an apartment building; and of another time when a firefighter undermined an EMT’s efforts, in the presence of the patient, as they took a patient’s medical history. The unprofessional behavior ran both ways. A firefighter tells of EMTs intentionally tossing fire equipment bags on the ground rather than handing them to the firefighters or of EMTs standing idly by watching firefighters struggle with something at a fire scene, never offering assistance.

Whether in the station or on a call, it was clear that the frustration level was negatively impacting the department’s professionalism and progress, something the typical firefighter leadership top-down methodology of the day was not equipped to deal with. RCFD’s training chief, Chief Taylor, reports that prior to and during the early days of the merger, structured leadership, interpersonal communication, or conflict resolution training was not offered. Knowing this helps one to understand why leadership appeared to be stymied as to how to work through the conflict. One assistant chief described any progress made as a “hard fought process,” mostly due to the culture of firefighting not

welcoming change; a comment made with a nod to a popular American firefighter colloquialism—200 years of tradition, unimpeded by change.

RCFD's Chief Foster, described by one subordinate as "not a micro-manager by any stretch of the imagination," had confidence his department would eventually level out and preferred to let them do so. "For them to improve and for them to feel like this was their department, change had to come from them; it couldn't just come from top down," he stated. However, one captain saw this as taking a benign-neglect stance, describing Foster's process as "learning on the fly." Rank-and-file interviewees expressed feelings that it seemed leadership did not pay attention to the important details which would have helped expedite the merger process, provide a sense of departmental security, and ease much of the daily tension.

Those details grew in number, causing frustration levels in the rank and file between suppression and EMS to rise as fast as the questions could be formed. Would uniforms be standardized? Will the department patch reflect both entities? How would overtime be managed? How would fill-ins work? Time off? Vacation schedules? Will the chain of command change? These and other details were not written into the merger. Chief Foster, who was a member of the Pension Board at the time, explains:

If we had waited until every single detail was anticipated and addressed, we would never have gotten off the ground. We felt that at some point we had to just jump in and do it and deal with the details as they came up.

Part III: Unexpected Leadership Emerges: Solutions and Resolution

In 2006, after 3 years of frustration, confusion, and finger pointing, two leaders began to emerge from an unlikely place within the organization—the rank and file. Brad, then a lieutenant, and Rusty, then a driver, each with about 8 years of service had an idea.

Both firefighters were good friends with a passion for leadership; both kept a close eye on nationally recognized fire departments and their leadership teams as they looked for ideas to model in their own career development and for their department.

In a post-9/11 world it had become popular for corporate organizations to look to the leadership of the New York City Fire Department (FDNY) for motivational speakers when hard-hitting leadership was required. The FDNY fire chief was soon courted by corporate America thirsting for a brand of leadership that inspires a team to follow their leader into the burning unknown, knowing full well they may never emerge. The motivational trend quickly caught on at many annual corporate conferences as high-performance, first-tier fire department chiefs became known for their unique brand of leadership. Fire departments were not immune to this trend, and with training being a priority issue in any fire department, training from their profession's best and brightest was highly coveted within their own circles.

Brad and Rusty caught the vision too, creating a plan to tap into this knowledge pool which they presented to their chief as the first River City Fire Department Leadership Symposium. It was a bold move to make in any paramilitary-like, top-down organization. It was an especially bold move in a culture that sifts new thinking through the shut-up-and-ride-backwards-kid sieve of never questioning the leader. Fortunately, River City had a fire chief with a collaborative style of leading, an open-door policy, and a complicated situation that could use all the help he could muster.

First Leadership Symposium

Partially funded by corporate sponsors, River City, the union local, and conference lunch ticket sales, the 2006 inaugural session of the Leadership Symposium

was held. Approximately 400 firefighters representing departments from as far away as the state capital and neighboring states to the west, east, and north came. The keynote speaker was a renowned specialist in fire leadership risk management who held the attendees in rapt attention, many nodding their heads in affirmation with the speaker's hard-hitting points. The chiefs, aka the White Shirts, sat together taking copious notes.

Paradigms were challenged that day. Visions were cast. Goals were set.

Enthusiasm was off the charts. It was a success with kudos abounding for days afterward. However, the enthusiasm, which hovered over the Symposium like an afterglow, quickly waned. Frustration was still evident and, by some accounts, worse, because they now knew what the performance standard was and they were not meeting it. A young firefighter recalled his post-Symposium effort to help the RCFD achieve greatness.

I was a young guy at the Leadership Symposium. I was all gung-ho like, YEAH! I'm a young guy and I can change the Department. So, I made some calls and had some burn cans—they look like semis—they look like a train car and we can do live fire training in them. I had a couple lined up and it was only like a few hundred bucks and we had the parking lot at Station 1 or the dump at 5th Street and I was like—"Can we get in?" I made the calls, ran the numbers—it was only a few hundred bucks. It never went anywhere.

The level of advancement Brad and Rusty had hoped for did not happen. It appeared that leadership did not know how to move through the change process in a manner that was realistic, decisive, and inclusive and that incorporated some form of accountability metric.

Adoption of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*

Aware that fresh ideas like the live fire training were dying on the vine causing a growing *why bother* attitude throughout the RCFD, Brad and Rusty worked diligently to move their vision forward. They were aware of Covey's, *The 7 Habits of Highly*

Effective People (1989), through their leadership research. In the late 90s, it had become popular in the River City area after being successfully adopted by several large corporations seeking to shift their organizational performances from good to great; success that was widely touted by the Covey organization. If it worked for the corporate world, Brad and Rusty reasoned, perhaps it would work for the RCFD.

Through the local college, they met a certified 7 Habits facilitator who offered to provide the training as a community service. With the pieces of their plan falling into place, Brad and Rusty once again approached their Chief for permission to assemble the top-ranking chiefs and captains for the training. It had never been done before in the 106-year history of the River City Fire Department. Chief Foster agreed and permission was granted. On June 16, 2007, four months before the second Symposium was held, 24 leaders of the River City Fire Department and EMS division, who had never sat together in the same room to discuss departmental issues, assembled for 8 intensive hours of 7 Habits training. The mayor of River City was on hand to bless the efforts of those present and to note the historic significance of the day. Underlying the cordial air of the day, a thread of tension and perhaps mistrust was palpable. The facilitator noted that there was clustering together of rank and of either fire suppression or emergency medical services. It was unbeknownst to the facilitator, until mentioned by the mayor, that this was an historic moment. It was the first time in the history of the RCFD that all sides sat together in one room to discuss the issues at hand. She stated,

All I knew was that I saw some people who were excited to be there—it might have been just the day away from the station or the donuts, but there were some happy people and there were some who were not and they were pretty clear about that in their body language. You know, later I wondered what the Mayor meant when he welcomed everyone to “this historic meeting” but now I know. They had

never done this sort of problem solving before—talking through things and holding each other accountable.

One firefighter shared his hopeful enthusiasm for what was to come.

I thought it was great. I thought it was wonderful because we needed to do something. We were so stagnant! We had to change—we do, but we don't. We have changed, but we haven't changed. Plus, if you get a couple of us to come back and talk about it and show the stuff and present the stuff and then you get a couple of people to do it you can broaden it out. You're not going to change everybody, but if you can change a majority of the guys . . . I thought it went really well. I love doing that stuff. Loved it!

Another commented, “Well, we tried stuff before. Right. This was just another attempt to get some of us to do more for nothing more.”

According to the 7 Habits method of conflict resolution, before any group can authentically work toward resolution, common ground must be established and an empathic connection made. While it would have been easy to identify the obvious economic reasons for the merger to be fully successful—in other words, establish common ground by force—the facilitator was able to intuit that this group needed to connect differently. After the usual round robin of introductions, housekeeping rules, and break times were given (the standard opening on any corporate training template), the facilitator posed a question: Why did you become a firefighter or EMT? As each participant shared their reasons, many deeply heartfelt, heads nodded in a knowingness only a member of the brotherhood would understand. Each person identified some part of their story in the stories of those around them. In essence, they had become firefighters or EMTs to help others, to lessen suffering, and to protect the citizenry; this was their common ground. In that moment, that nanosecond of shared knowingness, the facilitator reports the energy in the room shifted.

A second question was posed by the facilitator. What does your mission statement say? Somewhat embarrassed that most could not cite more than a few words, a search

was quickly made and the correct wording read to the group by Chief Foster. “The Fire Department provides an appropriate, safe and professional response to fire, medical and environmental emergencies. The department is dedicated to minimizing the loss of life and property through suppression, rescue, education, code enforcement, investigation and other programs.”

Mayor Ross joined in reminding attendees that the city’s vision statement included delivering world-class customer service and for a safe, elevated quality of life for River City’s citizens. Reminders of their own mission statement and River City’s vision statement caused the training participants to realize the infighting was holding them back from honoring their personally held motivations to be in this profession and as members in an organization of highly skilled professionals. With the common ground empathically established, they settled in, albeit somewhat haltingly at first, to fix the situation they were in. They were ready to begin the change process.

The 7 Habits Training Protocol

After settling in and establishing the reason for the training, it was important for participants to feel they were safe to talk openly without fear of reprisal. With promptings from Chief Foster that this was the time and place to work honestly and openly, the facilitator led them in agreeing that what was said in the room was to be held in a sacred trust. With the Covey training keystones in place (i.e., purpose empathically established and freedom to speak openly), the group moved on to learn the 7 Habits method for resolving conflict.

Because the group had already accomplished the first habit, Be Proactive, the habit of initiation, when they decided to work as a collaborative group, they were quickly

able to move to the second habit, *Begin With the End in Mind*, the habit of visualization. Again the facilitator posed a question, *What do you want the River City Fire Department to look and feel like in 10 years?* With some prompting, the group began to share their ideas of the future as the facilitator captured key points on the pages of the flip chart. As the discussion began to wind down, the facilitator assigned small groups to discuss what had been captured on the flip chart, and asked the groups to prioritize the items from least to most important. Once this step was complete the facilitator asked a representative from each group to come to the chart and write their numerical preference next to each item. This part of the process provided a visual of what the group considered to be the most important qualities desired in their future fire department. The facilitator then explained that those items they ranked highest—professionalism, fair opportunities to advance, and being well trained among others, were embodiments of their organizational values; and when everyone understands and holds the same organizational values, working toward and for them provides greater creative latitude in bringing the vision to fruition.

Habit 3, *Put First Things First*, the habit of priority, required the group to then think in terms of how these values meshed together and which were foundational to the others. In doing so, they were able to begin to understand and to project forward what exactly needed to be done in order to achieve them. It was a hard dialogue to have, one that exposed shortcomings and past missteps. However, the act of prioritizing their values list provided the group with a quick gap analysis between current behaviors and attitudes and those needed in order to achieve their idea of a balanced and fully functioning fire department.

With Habits 1, 2, and 3 in place, a foundation for change was established. Their list of values would now serve as their *True North*, a 7 Habits term for the grounding touch point(s) they would need when working through tough situations. Habits 4 through 7 were worked in the same manner, a template, with the facilitator introducing the habit and its conceptual composition; facilitating and monitoring general discussion; assigning small discussion groups, which were followed by a general report out time, large group discussion, and a call for consensus. As each round of discussion was held, the facilitator moved from small group to small group encouraging debate and dialogue, asking probing questions, and recording key points on the flip chart pages which were then posted on the walls until they were covered. She recalled:

The greatest advantage to my being a complete outsider facilitating this process was that I couldn't even claim a single firefighter in my lineage to offer as some sort of "understanding" about their culture. I truly was a fresh set of eyes. I only saw them as I saw any other organization. My trump ace as the facilitator in this situation was that I did not know what discussion prompt questions *not* to ask. I did not know the politics of the group; I did not know their underlying pecking order despite rank. I only knew that when I heard something in our early sessions that seemed a bit off or didn't make sense to then ask—*why* is that? Or, who made *that* a rule? *Why*? They hated those why questions and I'm sure wondered who this person was and what hubris she had to ask such questions. Didn't she know who she was talking to? But, they soldiered on. The why questions made them think long and hard; *why* challenged their paradigms. I could tell from some of their body language that I was definitely stepping on toes and treading on sacred ground at times, but these were questions that had to be asked and I think, deep down, they knew they had to be asked too.

This was a group that had never, in the 106 years of their organizational life, talked through a single problem together. Therefore, Habits 4 and 5 were the most difficult to facilitate, requiring the facilitator to pay close attention to the nuances and details surrounding each point of contention. Habit 4, Think Win-Win, and Habit 5, Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood, required participants to step out of their egos and shift to an empathic perspective with regard to each side of the merger scenario. In

their day-to-day work lives empathizing with a rescue victim came easily for them; however, for the firefighter to empathically hear the EMTs side of the merger issues or for the EMT to empathically hear the firefighter's side of the situation was a challenge. Thus, the discussion was often heated.

Because of the promise of safe dialogue and no retribution, the tenor of the discussion was allowed to continue but with the facilitator managing the dialogue so that all voices were heard and understood. In order to accomplish this, given all the emotional baggage that was being held within the group, the facilitator taught the group a 7 Habits mediation technique called *Faithful Translator*. Faithful Translator requires participants to think of themselves doing voice-over translations for a foreign movie. Each was asked to succinctly rephrase a key point of the opposing side in their own words until the opponent signaled approval that their thought(s) and feeling(s) were understood and faithfully expressed. As with Habits 1 through 3, key points were recorded on the flip chart before posting to the wall. Sequentially posting of all the flip chart pages allowed the group to track their progress throughout the day. During break times, the facilitator noted many participants would gather in pairs or small groups around a posted page to discuss in more detail what was written, often asking for a marker to change a point value or to make note for a point of clarification. This was taken by the facilitator as a sign of the participants feeling engaged, honored, and heard.

Habit 6, Synergize, the habit of unity and exponentiation, states that $1+1=3$, that the sum of the harmonious whole is greater than the solitary one. Habit 6 further teaches that the answer may not lie on one side or the other of an issue, but that there is a higher and better way, not yet known, of resolving the issue at hand; this is known as the Third

Alternative. To find the Third Alternative means seekers must be willing to let go of their ego's need to control an outcome. It further requires that they identify what they specifically and realistically can do.

This area of identification is called *Circle of Concern*. In a person's inner world Circle of Concern manifests as behavior. For example, because someone is concerned about a situation at hand or a situation impacting their personal world they might react in worry or judgment or fear; they express concern in their way but have no direct control over the situation. However, because most people do not live and work in isolation, they often need others to help in resolving conflict. Habit 6 teaches the interactions can be initiated to help lessen worry, judgment, or fear.

In order to identify those interactions, it is necessary to identify and work within what Covey refers to as the *Circle of Influence*. The Circle of Influence is a pool of resources available to us through interactions and agreements with others and requires a collaborative partnership to work. Habit 6, Synergize, the habit of collaborative problem solving, is the natural next step from Habit 5. With their most pressing values and issues prioritized and posted on the wall, the organizational Circle of Concern, the group began to identify and establish collaborative task teams comprised of mixed rank members from fire suppression, EMS, and the chiefs, their Circle of Influence.

Habit 7, Sharpen the Saw, the habit of sustainability, is the habit that would keep the efforts of the group moving through an extended period of time by attending to the nurturing of the group as a body of problem solvers. This was accomplished through balanced and fair interactions and everyone carrying their fair share throughout the

problem-solving process. Organizational balance manifests as a contented and engaged staff, clear and compelling goals, a sound business plan, and fiscal soundness.

Nearing the end of a long and emotionally exhausting time together, the training day closed with the group agreeing on four foundational issues or WIGs (Wildly Important Goals, a Covey term) to be immediately addressed in order for the organization to move forward. Those issues were: (a) realizing organizational unity, (b) improving communication, (c) solidifying structure, and (d) updating Standard Operating Guidelines (SOGs). Individuals then self-selected into one of four task teams, one team for each goal. Each team briefly discussed how they would address their task and set a time to meet to begin working.

Working together to resolve problems in a collaborative formalized manner was new to the group. In order to keep the group on track and to establish a pattern of accountability, the entire group agreed to meet each month for a year to report progress to the facilitator and to other task teams.

Realizing Organizational Unity

This task team agreed that while many in the RCFD were able to move beyond the merger fallout, there were still emotions lingering, holding back optimal performance in the fire houses and on the fire ground. It was felt that without everyone feeling they were an important part of the growth and development of this fire department, progress would be slow at best. Their greatest fear seemed to center on negative thinking, “stinkin’ thinkin’” according to Chief Foster. It was a mind-set that could undermine a new idea faster than they could jump on a fire truck.

In addition to the underlying negativity, the group also recognized that the handling of the emotional needs of the EMTs (not feeling heard and feeling disrespected) during the early days of the merger had caused damage to the organization's consciousness resulting in an *us and them* mind-set. The damage hindered some of the day-to-day training and operational issues as some still saw their side the dominant contingent rather than working toward a fully blended organization. It was felt the *us and them* mentality fed much of the negative thinking. Unless corrected, it would hamper development of the department.

The group felt that the buy-in from both sides regarding the importance of the merger was missing. Group discussion on this point revolved around how things might have been different if more frequent communication had been pushed through the organization during the merger and if more people had been involved in designing the rollout. Chief Foster, who was on the Pension Committee at the time the merger was signed into effect, stated that even the date of the final signature on the merger by the mayor was unbeknownst to basically everyone, including himself, until it was announced in the local newspaper. It was the consensus of the group that that piece of information alone, that lack of knowledge, information, and ownership, placed the organization's leadership at a disadvantage from which they struggled to recoup.

In the pre-merger days when both sides saw the need to join forces and sought to do so, it was not anticipated that both sides would not have input into the entire process. In short, those present in the 7 Habits training class felt there was little ownership, if any, throughout the RCFD in creating the type of organization they had envisioned. The target

goal of this group was to explore ways in which to lessen the divide between fire suppression and EMS.

Improving Communication

The communication task team identified three primary needs within this category. One, consistency in using email, quickly rose to the top of their list. Concerns voiced during the 7 Habits class regarding communication centered on the fact that not everyone in the RCFD would check their email on a regular basis and that many claimed ignorance as to how to log in to their email accounts. This created problems when directives were sent out only to be acted upon by some with the remainder claiming they were not aware of any directive. Because email is the official form of written communication in all service departments in River City, putting those who needed it through Outlook email training became this group's first goal.

A second goal for this task team was updating the Blue Box Card incident command communication system used when battling fires. Blue Box Cards are cue cards created for 911 call-center personnel by the fire department and are a standard communication tool used in fire departments around the United States. The Blue Box cards contain all the information a 911 operator would need when dispatching various units to an emergency scene including which emergency personnel are needed and what stations act as back up to the responding stations. Any changes in a municipality's road system, emergency protocol, equipment, and personnel need to be regularly updated on the Blue Cards. It is a vital, highly detailed, and time-consuming project. To not have them regularly updated could result in a response time resulting in disaster or even death.

Finally, this group expressed concern that directives were not coming down the chain of command in a clear and timely manner, creating confusion on more than one occasion, according to 7 Habits class members. Poor use of email notwithstanding, the task team pledged to work on a simple, manageable way to push information through the organization.

Solidifying Structure

Finding the right spot in the organizational structure for everyone was a crucial task especially in light of the emotional issues still lingering from the merger. Trying to avoid any further burnout resulting from the extended shifts meant finding a way to balance the workload. During the training class, several participants recalled plans made several years prior to the merger but that never came to fruition. The plans involved implementing a 3rd platoon (3rd shift) in order to provide better overall response coverage to the citizens of River City. Implementing a 3rd platoon would mean creating, staffing, and outfitting an entire new shift. The task team decided to see if the concept would work going forward and what would the resulting cost, structure, and operation of the organization would look like if the idea was carried forward.

Updating Standard Operating Guidelines (SOGs)

Typically referred to as Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) in the corporate world, Standard Operating Guidelines (SOGs) are the living operational documents within the River City Fire Department . These documents cover a gamut of concerns and rules, from the acceptable amount of facial hair, to running a hose evolution, to disciplinary actions. As laws and regulations change, along with updated fire and medical response protocols, SOGs are ideally updated on a regular basis reflecting those changes.

For the RCFD, it was felt that two issues surrounded the SOGs: (a) The need to stay on task regarding a regular schedule of updating, and (b) The inclusion of more detailed EMS information into the SOGs, as most important. This task team felt that beginning to work immediately on the SOGs would help give an extra measure of guidance and structure as the completion of the merger was worked out. They also planned to create a classification or coding system for the SOGs once they were updated.

Of the four task teams, SOGs required collaboration with the city's legal and human resources departments. Because of the needed collaboration, the group anticipated they might encounter delays out of their control and therefore might fall short of any deadlines set.

The Task-Team Template

The process, or template, was the same each time the large RCFD group met. The template was comprised of a large group discussion of the issues identified, followed by a brainstorming session for possible solutions. Solutions were then prioritized on a white board or flip chart paper and then were posted on the walls. From the large group, triads or quad discussion groups were broken out and assigned an item from the list by the facilitator. The participants discussed feasibility of each possible solution, resources required, and potential impact on the budget. After a designated amount of time, each group reported out to the whole group. This was then followed by a general discussion and vote for the most feasible solution. A group member would self-select to champion the solution and pick either task team members or members self-selected into a task team. Care was taken to ensure each team was balanced according to strengths and on the needs of the solution. The process was repeated for the next three items on the tear sheet.

Once goals are achieved, new goals are set using the same sift-and-sort discussion method of prioritizing goals. Accountability at this point is the simple, but powerful thought of team humiliation at the next accountability meeting if one's team did not make progress. (In the firefighting culture it is considered an anathema to not *man up* publically.)

The 7 Habits training concluded with viable goals identified and a renewed sense of purpose. Post-workshop evaluations and comments indicated that the 7 Habits process had been fairly painless, easy to incorporate into their culture, and, most importantly, provided them with a common tool and language for change such as WIGs, Circle of Concern/Circle of Influence, and Big Rocks/Little Rocks—the visual for Habit 3, Put First Things First. RCFD leadership left the training room with a refreshed vision and a shared commitment to work together. The group scheduled accountability meetings with the facilitator each month for a year in order to establish their learning as a new leadership habit designed to improve communication and keep the task teams on track. After the first year of monthly accountability meetings, leadership moved the meetings to a quarterly calendar. By 2011, the accountability meetings with the facilitator shifted to annual gatherings.

The Last Two Symposiums

Two more Symposiums were scheduled for the fall of 2008 and 2009 with the leadership team working between conferences on their list of ever-changing concerns and goals. Successful at achieving some goals while stagnating on others, the leadership team pressed forward. The core group eventually expanded to include more members of the rank and file after Brad and Rusty began the process of including everyone on their

individual shifts in the process in order to begin grooming the next level of leadership. They proactively taught those in the middle level of the hierarchy the same 7 Habits sift-and-sort empathic discussion method of goal setting to address issues that might surface within the shift but that did not necessarily impact anyone or anything outside of their shift. These mid-level leaders, along with Brad and Rusty, then passed the problem-solving template further down the chain of command by including as many members as possible in the process.

However, despite the amount of effort directed toward the tasks at hand, the annual accountability meetings with the facilitator were not enough to completely break down the *us and them* barrier which seemed to lightly linger despite their best efforts. Beginning to tire and feeling like they were at times banging their heads against the wall, the frequency of the leadership team meetings began to dwindle to quarterly or less.

Finally, with the 2008 economic crash drying up funding sources and a new competing fire service conference in the region, the last Symposium was held in October 2009. The keynote speaker was a fire chief and editor of a renowned firefighting publication. It was his message that struck a blow directly into the heart of each firefighter and EMT present; the deepest, most vulnerable part of them the other Symposium speakers were not able to touch.

This speaker poignantly reviewed the many missteps that resulted in the infamous 2007 Charleston Sofa Super Store fire which claimed the lives of nine firefighters forever immortalized as The Charleston Nine.

In a darkened room the speaker played a recording of the Charleston Nine. Beneath the scratch and crackle of the final radio communications between those inside

the inferno and fire ground command, pleas for help and farewell messages to loved ones could be heard. Attendees listened intently, barely breathing because they knew the Charleston Nine, shrouded in thick black smoke and with SCBAs rapidly beeping to indicate their air supply was expiring, crawled along the baseboards of the inner walls of the superstore searching for an air source (a survival tactic known as *sucking carpet* in firefighter language) and a way out. Everyone heard the nine firefighters—now separated from each other—try to orient themselves toward the exit based on directions given them by fire command outside. The desperation in those voices chilled Symposium attendees as they listened to their brother firefighters desperately struggle to find a way out, calling for help. One by one the nine voices were silenced in death.

It is the responsibility of every fire department's leadership team to have accurate information on all commercial structures within their jurisdictions. What no one realized until after the fact was that the floor plans being used by Charleston fire command were inaccurate and that communication was probably as bad as it could have been that fateful day. To not have accurate information available on the fireground is a serious leadership infraction of the highest order, one that resulted in the resignation of the Charleston fire chief among other costly consequences. The leadership lessons learned from the 2007 Charleston Super Store fire, both obvious and the more subtle, stand as training benchmarks for every fire department. Those lessons were not lost on the RCFD.

Their Covey facilitator was with them for the presentation and offers an observer's perspective to what she saw in her participants:

It was clearly a turning point for them. How could it not have been? They listened to nine of their brothers utter their last words to loved ones who would only hear those on a recording after their bodies were pulled from the rubble. My guys listened to the final gasps and gurgles of life being sucked from nine lives. There

but for the grace of God; it could have been any one of them stranded and down in an inferno, sucking carpet, with no air and no way out and they *knew* it. They *knew* it! You could see it in their faces when the lights were brought back up that if they didn't get serious about their vision for a better, stronger fire department then it could well be them and that they'd better pay attention to what happened in Charleston and learn from it.

The presentation was the organizational slap in the face the RCFD needed. For the 2009 Symposium participants, the fire scene communication they heard was all too real. It could have been any of them. While there were numerous factors that played into the death of the Charleston Nine, reasons that now stand as operational imperatives for fire departments worldwide, some of the key reasons discussed that day (e.g., communication issues and a disorganized leadership) struck a chord with the members of the River City Fire Department. Rising to the speaker's challenge that The Nine shall not have died in vain, the RCFD was newly inspired and deeply motivated to pick up where they had left off.

Once more visions were cast and goals set. The RCFD was fired up and inspired to complete the work they set out to do. Accountability meetings were once again a priority. For the next 3 years progress was made through an ebb-and-flow process driven by resources or manpower needed to push a goal to the top for final sign off. Between 2010 and 2012, larger goals such as the badly needed third ambulance, the implementation of a third shift/battalion, updated standard operating guidelines (SOGs), more cross-trained personnel, and a new fire station came to fruition through the same template process, making the RCFD the darling of River City leadership.

For all intents and purposes, the overarching goal of fully integrating the EMS into fire suppression and achieving a unified department, operationally, had finally happened. Only a few EMTs, outliers to the master plan, were not able to matriculate into

the 77 retirement fund. Despite this one detail, they were still considered and treated as regular members of the RCFD family. On the surface everything looked good.

A Small Detail Creates a Big Morale Problem

As 2012 came to a close, it was felt that the merger goals set by the Pension Board and the Board of Public Works and Safety were complete in all areas as exemplified by the tangible outcomes already noted. With the construction of the new fire station underway, plans to close the aging EMS building surfaced. Doing so would physically redistribute the EMS team into RCFD's four firehouses. For the first time in River City's history and 9 years after the merger was signed into effect, the two entities would finally be housed together.

Just as everyone was beginning to think their long journey of change was at the finish line and while success was being touted, a morale issue began to surface within the rank and file. The establishment of the third shift/battalion and the integration of the EMS staff into the fire stations brought about a plethora of living arrangement details that needed to be addressed; for example, having a structured plan in place to set up and equip the new fire station to accommodate the EMTs' need to warehouse specialized materials, an adequate number of beds, the new consumption rate of supplies at each fire house, sufficient parking spaces, and even the addition of new refrigerators, all necessary details so that the rank and file could properly live in and work out of the stations. What harried leadership took as small items to be addressed as the need arose, the rank and file read as poor planning on leadership's part.

Leadership set a goal of January 1, 2013, by which time they planned to have the daily living details worked out. Achieving the stated goal required the other stations to

shuffle resources and equipment, a logistical task which ultimately fell to the chiefs to finalize but for the captains to carry out in each house. The best of intentions crumbled. One captain related the frustration emanating from his team. Feeling that the day-to-day needs of his team were not being met and thus beginning to cause morale problems, he referred to a promise made by the chiefs that everything would be in order by January 1, 2013.

On January 1st, they weren't ready to move the medics, so they were like—we'll do it next month and then it was next month and then next month. It got to be March before they finally moved. And then when they moved they had 3 months to stock medical closets 'cause now we had 3 medical closets, beds, fridges, Lazy-Boys—sorry, but those, too! (Laughs). *Everything! Everything* played into it. They closed Station 5 so moving everything from Station 5 to Station 3. They were all moved in and still waiting for shelving or arguing about shelving or where are we going to buy shelving from or even, do we have money for shelving? Like if you go upstairs right now to our kitchen, we have one of our fridges is out in front of our white board where we write everything on. We had to turn it sideways and then we had to put the refrigerator in the corner—it looks goofy as heck; but if you go to Station 2, their 3rd refrigerator is in a hole which used to be a doorway so it's actually sticking out into the living room. They said this would all be done; they said everything would be done; it's supposed to be done. All they need is to get a carpenter in here; most of these guys will do it and most of us have done it. They [the chiefs] said; "Buy us the stuff and we'll take the cabinets out and put the fridges in and redo it all. And yet we're sittin' here, June 14th, 6 months later and—"It's comin'! It's comin'! . . . I think there's a point where you kind of give up.

The treatment of the new refrigerators for the third shift became emblematic of rank and file's frustration. Because firefighters provide their own food while on duty (called a *board bill*) each shift has its own refrigerator in the firehouse kitchens; each one is considered sacred ground, off limits to other shifts. Frustration was again expressed. If leadership did not care enough about their workers to make appropriate accommodations for their food storage a priority, then what else did they not care about? According to the rank and file, they had worked hard and successfully on all their tasks and they expected the same performance from their leadership. Gaffs such as not being ready for the new

shift and EMTs to move into the firehouses caused them to wonder if the chiefs cared about life on the other end of the chain of command.

Leadership's Response to Perceived Inaction

The chiefs acknowledged their responsibility to the task teams for moving certain initiatives forward. However, for a variety of reasons, reasons often associated with the responsibilities of upper management, the chiefs were not able to progress with some initiatives as anticipated. They willingly shared thoughts about their shortcomings which may have contributed to final outcomes for some of the initiatives. One battalion chief recalled a few initiatives coming through for signature, only for those documents to become one of many documents on his desk requiring further action when he had time. Although verbal approval and an initial sign off may have been given at the chiefs' level, budget change approvals and legal regulations would often apply thus requiring signatures outside of the department such as the Mayor or Treasurer. Sending documents to City Hall for further action only doomed the paperwork to yet another pile of documents awaiting scrutiny somewhere on a desk in the bowels of their municipal governance. When faced with numerous pressing demands, prioritization of a request's urgency reigns supreme, and in the world of maintaining public safety around the clock, resources to reconfigure the placement of a refrigerator seemed not so urgent from the higher vantage point.

Assistant Chief Taylor, in addition to his role as department trainer, was also responsible for the maintenance and installation of all physical facilities and equipment for the RCFD during this merger. In a department the size of River City's, the training officer position alone is a full-time job, let alone carrying the additional workload of

maintaining the department's property. While understanding the impact the refrigerator situation was having on the rank and file's morale, Chief Taylor felt the scope of his responsibilities spread him too thin and the department's budget inadequate to address the situation in a win-win way. Referring to the department's budget, he pointed out that with an overall annual repairs and maintenance budget of about \$153,500 to cover the basic needs of keeping four fire stations and all equipment and apparatus functional, not much remained for across the board remodeling projects to accommodate the aesthetic placement of the refrigerators. It seemed for him a never-ending game of dealing with the squeakiest wheel. His dilemma—approve funds to refurbish a fire engine or pay to have mechanical lines reconfigured for a refrigerator. According to Chief Taylor, the fix was never as quick, easy, or as cut and dry as some would assume.

There's more to it than just making room for these refrigerators. For the most part, they are going into older structures and these newer units require a plumbing line and more electricity than what is there. Sometimes it may mean even cutting through concrete subfloors so we have to allow for that. What seems like an easy job is really going to cost much more.

One battalion chief concurred based on his observations of Chief Taylor's efforts to keep everything on an even keel:

I wish we could go back to the days when they had a training chief and that's all he had to do. Chief Taylor has so much other stuff to do, he's got buildings maintenance, he's got trucks, he's got all this stuff. . . . It became a joke at one accountability meeting because everything that was brought up was; Well, Chief Taylor's in charge of that. *Everything*. Well, Chief Taylor is in charge of that. Well, Chief Taylor's in charge of that. Well, Chief Taylor's in charge of that. And it's like—How can the guy get anything done, much less training?!

It seemed as if leadership was experiencing déjà vu as in the earlier days of the merger when need outpaced capacity. With the merger logistics in place, departmental growth was moving faster than they could lead it. The frustration of trying to balance the daily operational needs of the department against the daily needs of life in the firehouse

resulted in burnout which often manifested in the chiefs as short-term stagnation or paralysis. One assistant chief observed where the RCFD chiefs were in terms of their task teamwork:

We've gotten to where we're just sittin' on things. I don't think that's from lack of enthusiasm of the people on the committees I've been involved with. I think it's driven by the volume. . . . The volume for the department just continues to rise on top of all those things. The work just goes up. The operational budget doesn't go up as fast as the load goes up and that's a constant battle.

Chief Foster, acknowledging that his delegation skills could use some work, described the ever-evolving and growing workload he and his chiefs carry as “whitewater,” a term used in the 7 Habits for the constant churning nature of today's workplace.

The thing I still have difficulty with is I can have a checklist, you know, like my Covey checklist, and put down a dozen things I want to accomplish the next day and unfortunately it's still happening today; I can get sidetracked or pulled a half dozen different ways and by the end of the day a lot of that checklist remains undone. But, that's just the nature of the beast. We're better at it, but we're still not where we need to be in terms of focusing on the task at hand. It's too easy to get sidetracked.

Assistant Chief Taylor noted that prior to the merger there was no training to prepare leadership for the depth and scope such a drastic change as the merger created, let alone how to manage and lead through smaller changes. With an annual training budget of only \$4,000, Chief Taylor acknowledged the limitations such a budget holds for what might be considered enhanced training, such as leadership training, on top of all the fire safety training required. Currently, the baseline trainings offered by the RCFD are self-directed monthly training packets Taylor assembles and distributes. Brad and Rusty, utilizing the 7 Habits concept of Circle of Influence, have stepped up with a few other officers to hold hands-on trainings with neighboring fire departments in order to leverage the department's brain trust and training budget. They have also tapped into the

experience bank of the RCFD to develop training sessions with skilled individuals in the department who have, in the past, been overlooked as trainers. Developing partnerships with other organizations and working with their 7 Habits facilitator has enabled the RCFD to maximize their training budget dollars and provide Assistant Chief Taylor with much needed support. By the end of 2013, the RCFD announced the establishment of a training committee to not only help alleviate Chief Taylor's workload, but to also increase the depth and scope of training possibilities.

Overall, the consensus of the chiefs was, all things considered, that they were adequately leading the department, but they knew they could do better. Given the increasing new demands of their profession, most of them felt poorly equipped, budgeted, and staffed to meet their own self-imposed performance expectations let alone those of their peers and subordinates. One captain succinctly expressed their dilemma; "It's depressing when we [RCFD] know what we need to do and we still don't do it."

Part IV: RCFD's Progress as of 2013

Looking back on the original goals of Organizational Unity, Improved Communication, Solidifying Structure, and Updating Standard Operating Guidelines (SOGs) it is easy to see the depth and breadth of this undertaking. Attrition helped quell the negative mind-set regarding Organizational Unity when 30% of RCFD's workforce retired between 2011 and 2013. Along with the retirees went the long-held hostilities surrounding the merger and the older generational thinking that made it hard to accept new ways such as female firefighters or the new breed of cross-trained firefighters. As Brad noted, "It's progress one retirement at a time."

Realizing Organizational Unity

Efforts applied to Realizing Organizational Unity included the involvement of more individuals in the problem-solving process which gave not only a sense of department ownership to those involved, but also an appreciation for all the interdependent elements required to solve a problem in such an organization. For the RCFD, the task-team concept also allowed for individuals who might not otherwise work together, because of shift schedules or station assignments, to work together on problems identified. In doing so task-team members began to know and understand each other in a different way which strengthened relationships, building a stronger department culture.

It was also noted by everyone that the visible success for this particular goal did not become apparent to all until early 2013 when the aging EMS station was closed and the EMTs were assigned to the various fire houses. As one EMT observed, “When you live with somebody as much as we do, you get to know who they really are.” Living together under one roof, the older firefighters, EMTs, and cross-trained firefighters gained greater appreciation for each other. One interviewee, noting how in the past it was rare for an EMT to be able to finish a meal without being called out multiple times, observed firefighters beginning to keep meals warm for the EMTs until they returned or of EMTs supporting the firefighters with similar acts of kindness. For the newer generation of firefighter, this reciprocal kindness was a given. It was inconceivable for them to think there was a time in the River City Fire Department when those who had rushed out in the middle of a meal, risking their life to save a life, was ever allowed to come back to a cold plate of food.

Standardizing Uniforms

Standardizing the daily uniform, not the formal dress uniform, became an important sub-goal of the Organizational Unity task team that surfaced as they worked on other issues. At the time of the merger, EMTs had a uniform consisting of navy blue cargo trousers and shirts with specific insignia designating rank and department, indicated by tags, pins, and/or patches. Higher ranking officers wore white shirts. In the RCFD, a similar uniform was worn but members were allowed to freely interchange trouser and shirt styles as long as a general look was maintained.

Badges and names are embroidered on casual polo type shirts, a look that was too casual in Battalion Chief Conner's opinion, an opinion strongly voiced:

I couldn't wait to be on the big truck with a blue uniform and the badge. I wore a badged shirt. If we wouldn't have gone to these [indicates his polo shirt with embroidered badge] I'd probably still be wearing it [the badge]. That's the image that I like to portray—a professional fire department.

Feeling that a unified look would go a long way toward creating a bond between fire suppression and EMS, this task team searched for and priced several options before settling on two final options. During one accountability session, both options were presented for a vote. Because the vote was close, the group decided to defer to the chiefs for final approval and sign off.

While there was some provision in the budget for individual uniform allowance (\$1,250) which includes specialized gear, the group understood that any costs over and above the allotted amount would be their responsibility. Everyone was in agreement, and the two uniform samples were sent to the chiefs for further discussion, selection, and processing. After much prompting from the head of the uniform task team and several lengthy delays, the uniforms were finalized in late 2012.

Revised Department Logo

The ultimate visual for unifying any organization is its logo, the visual representation to the world about the organization. It was noted in the interviews that in order to show the River City community and other fire departments in the region that this department was now a unified fire-based emergency services department, their logo needed to be revised. While no structured task team was assigned to champion this project, its roots were firmly planted in the Realizing Organizational Unity's task-team jurisdiction. Chief Foster, along with his administrative team and Mayor Wilson, who surprised everyone with his prior formal graphic design experience, worked on the new design.

The new image was revealed at the dedication of the new fire station, holding a place of honor as the main focal point on the front of the building. To the average onlooker, the clean sharp image contrasted against the brick façade appeared to be nothing more than a striking contemporary organizational logo. But to the River City Fire Department, the image embodied their rebirth as a fully functioning cross-trained emergency entity.

Each year, the office of the mayor in River City designs and creates a pewter Christmas ornament depicting a particularly outstanding event that occurred that year in River City. The ornament for 2013 was a depiction of the new fire station with the new logo clearly visible. The ornaments are presented as mementos to selected individuals and organizations that have played a part in River City's success during the year. One of the ornaments was given to RCFD's 7 Habits facilitator.

Communication Task Team

Throughout the change process, clear and timely communication between the rank and file and the leadership team improved. Initially, the monthly accountability meetings served as a solid communication tool when leadership team members would report back to their various department constituencies. It was during these report-back sessions that the rank and file had an opportunity to voice their concerns in addition to Chief Foster's open-door policy as a means of bringing ideas forward to help support this initiative. Brad and Rusty added an extra dimension of communication by holding regular shift meetings with their teams, using the same template format, personally pushing any communication from the top farther down the chain of command, which ensured understanding and compliance. This process also empowered the lower level of the rank and file by involving subordinates in the day-to-day running of the shifts. EMS Chief Tyndale also used this model with his staff. They are the only officers, known to this study, to have held and still hold this type of regular meeting at the rank-and-file level.

By including all levels of the chain of command in the communication process, these three creative officers were able to keep all communication flowing, top down and bottom up, a critical element for success in any organizational change process.

Because email is a critical means of communication in the River City Fire Department, several 4-hour workshops in Microsoft's Outlook were scheduled for the rank and file at the local college, with the college providing the training as a community service. Making sure everyone receives and reads their email remains an issue, but overall, the training sessions helped to lessen written communication issues. The instructor was surprised to learn that many of the participants had a simple fear of any

program in the Microsoft Office Suite. Once those individuals were walked through some basic exercises designed to be engaging, fun, and productive, they tackled the rest of the class with enthusiasm. Several iterations were offered to accommodate schedules and the number of participants.

An additional enhancement of the training was teaching the participants how to use River City's intranet system, particularly the shared drive for the department. Prior to the communication task team taking on the increased use of the shared drive as a goal, participation was reported to be extremely low. The Outlook training was a natural connecting point in making sure everyone knew how to access the shared drive, read, save, and retrieve documents from the drive in addition to how to browse the drive in order to attach documents to email. Ranking officers were also shown how to use delivery-and-read receipts in order to ensure timely compliance of any written directives shared through this method of communication. Lower ranking participants were surprised to learn that their email could be tracked through receipts, thus ending the typically used excuse of, I didn't get it.

Rusty noted that while communication was bad to begin with, it was still bad but better nonetheless because of the work of the communication task team. "We have better communication and our communication is awful. *It's awful*, but it's 100% better than it was."

Progress of the Standard Operating Guidelines Task Team

In 2009 the Standard Operating Guidelines was the first task team to check in with a finished product, having all guidelines, procedures, and policies updated to that point in time. Throughout the process they consulted with similar-sized fire departments and River City's Public Works and Safety Board to bring the SOGs current, especially with regard to any legalities involved. However, as time progressed and because these are living documents that evolve alongside the department's role, a few members suggested that the SOGs be color coded to signify levels of significance.

Red, green, and yellow were chosen as the classification colors: red signifying life critical functions, green signifying daily operations, and yellow signifying moderate level policies. Policies and procedures, as in any organization, can be boring and easily ignored. However, in a profession that deals daily in life and death, knowing how to stress the importance of following the SOGs to his team is something Brad excels at. Putting a humorous spin on the color coding system, he said; "Green basically won't kill you. Yellow could hurt you and has some punishment to it. Red will kill you—stop right now and strict punishment is coming to you."

SOGs are living documents reflective of any changes that occur within the fire department. Because of this, Chief Taylor anticipates a team annually checking them for relevance and updating. The SOGs are now in a set of binders (one set per fire house), sorted, coded, and openly available should a question arise.

Progress of the Structure Task Team

The function of the Structure Task Team was to ensure that all duties were properly covered. In doing so, they also set out to help bring the idea of a third platoon

(or third shift) into being. In this profession's experiences, the third platoon concept is used by many fire departments as a way to relieve the burnout of a two-shift cycle. It was also an idea previously considered by a predecessor to Chief Foster, but never implemented. Working with city officials and the leadership team, the Structure Task Team played a critical role in launching the third shift in early 2013 at about the same time as the new fire station, Station 4, was opened.

Another goal of this team, one undertaken by EMS Chief Tyndale, was to research and document the need for a third ambulance to not only meet the needs of a growing city, but to also provide relief to the city's two aging ambulances. Beginning in 2007, Chief Tyndale began the meticulous documentation of the number of medical calls placed in the 911 call center, the cost of maintaining the two ailing ambulances versus revenue generated, the cost of a new ambulance, the return on investment (ROI) of the new ambulance versus revenue generated by call response in the growing areas of River City, staffing costs, and, most importantly, the financial impact a new ambulance would have on the mental and physical well-being of his subordinates if the work of attending to River City's needs were spread out over three ambulances.

Chief Tyndale presented his findings to the city council in 2009, which struggled during the national economic downturn to find the necessary funds for such the expenditure. Finally, as the economy improved, The River City Fire Department was approved to purchase the new ambulance in 2012. Chief Tyndale oversaw the long process of selection, customization of the build, equipment selection, and finishes, all while trying to stay within the budget set by the city council. On January 1, 2013, the new ambulance was placed into service.

Task-Team Similarities

Each of the task teams utilized similar skills learned in the 7 Habits training sessions. Existing skills brought to the classes were honed to fit into the problem-solving template. In order for these task teams to accomplish their goals the process required them to walk through their desired objective in light of the 7 Habits. It is through the repetition of this process and consistent accountability sessions, along with diligently exercising Covey's empathic listening and faithful translator models, that enabled this fire department's members to move beyond egocentric thinking to a more inclusive and empathic mind-set. Rusty, responding to being asked what was now different for him, shared his most important take-away from the task-team process:

Seeing the other side of the argument—Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood. I think that helped me a lot because I'm pretty confident where I'm at with my knowledge, skills and abilities, but that's kind of a trap because you expect everybody to be where you're at with knowledge, skills and abilities and there's always a counterpoint. No matter what, no matter how great your idea or perspective is, there's always a counterpoint. And if you don't understand the counterpoint, then you are going to make enormous mistakes.

Brad felt learning to identify what was really important each day put his job into perspective. Responding to the same question—What is different for you now? he gave a long sigh before responding:

I think the one thing that benefitted me personally and professionally is that for the most part I think the one thing I think I've been really good about is things that stress me in this role. But the one thing before that I really like is he [Covey] talks about the rocks and the sand – worry about the big things, let the small stuff go and it's just stuff – know what I mean? That's probably the one thing of all I really revisit in my head – at the end of the day is this really worth worrying about? So what if it takes someone a few minutes to do this, then it's a pretty good day. I can always joke. I wake up, my kids wake up – the rest is easy. I mean, it helps you keep a level head and sometimes around here, well, it's hard to do [laughs], you know?

Ten years after the merger was signed in effect, the River City Fire Department looks and feels much different. The large retirement wave that took place left room for a class of young, well-educated, high-energy, high-quality recruits known as Probies. These new hires work in collaborative, mixed-gender work teams alongside integrated leadership teams, standard elements of today's workforce. When interviewed, they appeared amazed as they talked about the tales told around their station's kitchen table; stories from years prior about a divided and hostile department, political appointments, and of a time in the RCFD when a female EMT would be openly hazed and harassed to the point of quitting. This new breed of cross-trained EMT firefighter only knows of their River City Fire Department as one of the most respected, most highly trained forces in the region. They know only a fire department where they are properly mentored, fairly compensated, and encouraged to lead at every opportunity while being provided limitless chances for professional growth and development. One of the newest members of the RCFD, who participated in a focus group interview comprised of new cross-trained firefighter/EMT members with 3 years of service or less, shared his thoughts as the others in the group nodded in affirmation:

This is a great place to be a firefighter. Yeah, I've heard the stories especially when Jane was kind of new and all the crap she went through but it's not that way now. I don't know why anyone would disrespect her. Heck, she could take some of the guys down. She knows her job and is good at it—very good. And how the old guys were—old school kind of stuff but they cared, too. Most of 'em are retired now. We can grow here; Brad is the best because he makes sure everyone is involved and everyone has a say and a chance to learn and a chance to move up if we want. He definitely won't let you sit on your butt, though. You gotta contribute.

Former Mayor Ross, mayor in 2003, recalls the turning point when the members of the RCFD internalized their own power to change.

I saw certain people begin to act differently; people communicating that didn't communicate before and people understanding other people differently than before. . . . It was interesting because you were starting to see a change in the culture of the fire department. . . . I think what happened is that the 7 Habits really started kicking in and it all became real.

River City's current mayor, Mayor Wilson, watched the evolution of the River City Fire Department first as a city council member, then as the mayor who saw the group through another contract negotiation in 2012. It was a negotiation process he describes as "culturally sweeping for the department" because they were able to negotiate in good faith and "on common ground." He attributes the growing pool of young leaders and the scope of change within the department to the 7 Habits training program. Mayor Wilson firmly stated: "We've had the most dynamic, the most progressive, most changed department in the city in 13 years. I attribute a lot of that to this program. . . . The program made this city a better place to live."

Upon reflection of their journey, members of the River City Fire Department will proudly tell you that while the four foundational goals and sub-goals were accomplished, there is work yet to do and so they have gone on to set and achieve other goals. The conflict-resolution, goal-setting skills and organizational-change tools, and common language learned in The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People training remains with them. Chief Foster describes the journey as "an interesting endeavor," one that cemented regular management communication meetings into the culture, and also, an endeavor that taught him well.

As Chief, I never thought I had all the answers and the more I came to know this, the more this has taught me to trust in the workforce and trust in the people I have working with me on the fire department. . . . There is no such thing as the status quo. . . . I've learned a lot through this. Looking back I think I would change the way I did or said things if I could—I would have tried to make them more clear. But now I know.

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People was acknowledged by the interviewees (except the Probies who had not been a part of the change process) as having played a key role in the evolution of their fire department. Rusty, now a captain, succinctly summarized the impact the 7 Habits had on the River City Fire Department. When asked if he felt, after 10 years, that the department had truly embraced the concepts of The 7 Habits as a problem-solving tool, he nodded affirmatively and stated, “Our mission is more defined and we’re operating in a better environment and a safer environment. It’s [The 7 Habits] just become part of us.”

Summary

For all their starts, stops, and stumbles, the leadership team of the River City Fire Department was able get back up each time and to ultimately meet all of their original goals using the problem solving model taught in the 7 Habits training sessions. Interviewees acknowledged that their often long productivity gaps could rightfully be attributed to malaise, frustration, lack of cooperation, or priority conflicts—stumbling blocks most organizations face when dealing with such change. Their strong professional principles and persistent accountability, their drive to get back up and not give up each time they stumbled carried them through a decade of growth, forever changing the culture of their fire department.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, FINDINGS, AND DISCUSSION

We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them. —Albert Einstein

Introduction

This case study examined the leadership journey experienced by a Midwestern American fire department as they navigated the white waters of organizational change when merged with their city's Emergency Medical Services Department. Throughout their journey they overcame many of the pitfalls common to organizational change. This organization learned to work within the parameters of their paramilitary structure, a foundational cultural element which could not, for human safety reasons, change. Not being able to direct the change process at the foundational level would cause some organizational leaders to view this situation as a potential deal breaker, dooming any long term change effort. However, this fire department embraced it as an opportunity to strengthen its foundation and thus the outcome of their efforts (Cameron & Quinn, 2011, p. 37).

The purpose of this study was to answer the research question: In what ways did *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (Covey, 1989) inform the organizational change process during the merger of fire suppression and emergency medical response in one American Midwestern fire department during the years 2007-2013?

Research Design

This qualitative single case study employed interviews collected from members of varying rank within the River City Fire Department along with artifacts and ratings of an independent assessment entity to answer the research question. Selecting the case study methodology was deemed best in order to fully understand why and how a single decision or sequence of decisions was made within this group in order to meet the municipally mandated merger of fire suppression and emergency medical services (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Yin, 2009). It was also the best format for fully understanding various elements that, while apparent on the surface, required deeper insight about the situation (Creswell, 2008; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Yin, 2009).

It is the focus on the decision-making element of a case study which differentiates it from other methodologies. Because this study examined a very human process, decision making, it was expected that unforeseen elements would emerge as the study progressed; they did and are addressed in this summary (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Maxwell, 1996; Yin, 2009).

The nature of this study validates the research process for examining a limited sample study. It meets Yin's (2009) criteria for a case study, to wit: (a) a technically distinctive situation with multiple elements of interest relying on it, (b) multiple sources of data which need to converge through triangulation, and (c) that the study is strengthened by prior theoretical findings.

The multiple data sources examined in this study offer a broad area of examination with regard to the historical and behavioral considerations in this

organization. Data in this study were drawn from observations, department documents, the department's Insurance Service Office (ISO) rating, which is the universal performance standard of American fire departments; Department history, artifacts, member interviews, and researcher journal entries.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was taken from Cameron and Quinn's (2011) Competing Values Framework (CVF) model (see Figure 1). Their model places less emphasis on formulaic answers while focusing more on the tools and mechanisms needed to work within any change scenario involving two or more interests/cultures. Much like a craftsman selecting the right tool for the job at hand, CVF empowers leadership to critically examine their organization in light of people, resources, values, beliefs, and assumptions. It further allows foundational change to emerge by creating an environment capable of supporting and sustaining future change endeavors (Cameron & Quinn, 2011).

The metaphor of muscle groups in the human body helps to explain the power and value of each quadrant in the Competing Values Framework. Consider that any organization is like a human body comprised of muscle groups. Through use, some muscle groups become stronger than others over time. When one muscle group becomes too strong, the others struggle to function. If an organization's cultural muscle of control (hierarchy) is too strong, it will overpower or kill the creativeness (adhocracy) of the members. If the collaborative nature (clan) is too strong, it may be a negative influence on competition as members give too much to the competition (market). A healthy

organization will strive for balance, or as close to balance as possible given their product or service, their members, and resources.

Competing Values Framework provides leadership with strategic flexibility allowing for change to evolve by creating an environment capable of supporting and empowering members and sustaining that environment through future change endeavors.

The Context of the Study

This study examines how the River City Fire Department used a corporate change tool, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (Covey, 1989), to help tackle the challenges they faced when merged with a para-organization, the Emergency Medical Services Department in River City. The need for such mergers is growing in direct proportion to the national economic trend of eliminating redundancy and consolidating services. Past methods of change through municipal policy directives or upper rank mandates do not fully address the role of culture in the change process (Bruncini, 2008; Pettigrew, 1979; Sargent, 2006; Sendelbach, 2009). Organizational members create and sustain the culture of the organization. Therefore, change scenarios such as the one the RCFD found itself in are expected to have a more positive change outcome when as many members as possible are invited into the change process, as was done in this organization (Cameron & Quinn, 2011, p. 7).

Choosing to adopt S. Covey's (1989) *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* was a simple one, predominantly driven by its user-friendly format and budget-minded cost. With most of their \$4,000 annual training budget earmarked for tactical trainings and half a fiscal year remaining when the decision was considered, finding a certified Covey facilitator who offered to provide the training as a community service was a stroke of

luck for the River City Fire Department. Most of the FranklinCovey family of training programs can run into the thousands of dollars in materials and facilitator time, depending on the number of participants and scope of the project under consideration. However, The 7 Habits materials are within public reach, readily available through any bookseller at a nominal cost. Realizing that low cost does not always equate to quality, the two informants to this study, Brad and Rusty, trusted a third driving factor in their decision process—the known success of the 7 Habits program in several large corporations located within a few minutes’ drive time from the River City Fire Department. The success of those organizations has been documented in *Living the 7 Habits: The Courage to Change* (Covey, 1999, pp. 149-159).

While these factors of ease, cost, and reputation led to the introduction of the 7 Habits program into the RCFD, it was the post-training general consensus of the participants which convinced leadership that the program was realistic and could easily be made part of their culture. It was adopted as their leadership and decision-making model.

Summary of the Findings

This section answers the research question: How did the adoption of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (Covey, 1989) influence the organizational change process during the merger of fire suppression and emergency medical response (EMS) in one American Midwestern fire department during the years 2007-2013? It is organized as follows: (a) provision of common guidelines and language for change, (b) impact on the organizational change process, and (c) triangulation markers indicating organizational change (Yin, 2009) during the years 2007-2013.

Provision of Common Guidelines and Language for Change

The 7 Habits (7H) training program provided a safe method for expressing differing opinions among the Department's leadership team through a sift-and-sort template of discussion encompassing an idea presented/problem identified, small-group dialogue, large-group feedback, and vote by consensus for action. Because the leadership of this organization, in their 106-year history, had never sat together to discuss leadership issues governing their fire department and because of the underlying hostilities present in the organization, the facilitator felt it was best to rearrange the order of 7 Habits material by introducing Habit 5, Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood early on. This was a group that needed to learn to have open, respectful and honest dialogue first before they could authentically talk to each other let alone step into the problem-solving arena.

Along with the facilitator's moderation and insistence on respect of all opinions brought forth, this template set up a learning cycle for the group wherein the consideration of part or all of a differing opinion was just that—a consideration, not a commitment to an idea until consensus was reached. The discussion template created a safe zone for participants by providing a mental space for reflection and the ability for the group to more deeply consider what resonated with them. This allowed them the freedom to choose what thinking/actions to retain and what elements were best left behind. In the 7 Habits, this is known as the Proactive model (1989, p. 71).

The foundation of such candid dialogue and discussion is the rules of engagement seated within the art of empathic communication (Covey, 1989, pp. 235-260), a cornerstone of the 7H construct. In support of their new learning cycle, empathic communication opened up lines of communication, superior/subordinate and peer/peer,

leveling the playing field. Rank was checked at the door, and each participant was asked to view fellow participants in their primary role as members of the organization, not by rank. In doing so, fear of retribution for candidly speaking, or fear of humiliation for asking a wrong question, a very real fear in a paramilitary organization, was removed (Childs, 2005; Hayes, 2010; Kegan & Lahey, 2001). Members were taught how to check their perceptions generated in dialogue through an empathic listening model called faithful translator, a communication tool that enables communicants to drill down to the core of an issue in a respectful manner until each party indicates they have been fully and correctly heard. This is accomplished through a back-and-forth cycle of rephrase content—reflect feelings, a principle of Habit 5, Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood (Covey, 1989).

After grounding in the discussion template and rules of engagement, the group learned to differentiate between the organization's principles and values. In the 7 Habits, principles are defined as natural laws that cannot be broken. They are intrinsic guidelines for human conduct that are permanent foundational blocks to the human process such as human dignity, fairness, loyalty, and love/acceptance. Principles are not practices, are not values, and do not change across cultures. They are intrinsic to human nature and can also be found in the life nature of an organization. Covey considers principles to be like a compass, a guiding directional force for an individual's or organization's life energy (Covey, 1989). When guiding principles can be identified and accepted as such, then how to change becomes focused as all efforts are driven by the guiding question: Does this action align with my/our guiding principles? Once the participants in this study made the connection between their guiding principles and their mission statement, they were easily

able to differentiate between activities that propelled them toward their vision of the highly functioning and fully unified fire department embodied in their mission statement versus those activities that deterred them from achieving it.

Values differ from principles in that they do change over time as need dictates. In the case of the River City Fire Department, examples of values they hold would be the need for updated fire apparatus, the best oxygen tanks (SCBAs), and caliber of training to name a few. Over time the values shift; for example, as newer, more efficient equipment is made available, the desire for the old models falls away or better training and response techniques are developed, thus making the old unsafe. Understanding the difference between principles and values enabled the leadership team to quickly cut through extraneous information and petty disagreements, allowing them to significantly shorten, yet strengthen, their strategic planning sessions.

Prior to the 7H training, the River City Fire Department's leadership team had never, in their 160-year history, sat together to openly discuss what their guiding principles were. Upon conclusion of the training, leadership was able to name servant leadership, loyalty, continuous improvement, and respect for resources as their guiding principles. Toward the end of the training, leadership was able to link their principles to the design of their four meta-goals, realizing department unity, improving communications, updating the Standard Operating Guidelines (SOGs), and improving structure. In linking their values to these same goals, they were able to know when and if ideas or past practices no longer served the principles and whether they needed to be updated to reflect new paradigms, could be partially modified, or completely discarded.

Their eventual ability to align their vision of a unified and strong fire department through consensus of their guiding principles and values, along with their new skill in empathic conversation, was evident to outsiders during the most recent contract negotiations with River City. This negotiation process was noted by Mayor Wilson as the “easiest negotiation” he has known (personal communication, June 27, 2013). This is in direct opposition to the previous contract negotiation, prior to the 7H training, between the RCFD and former Mayor Ross, who characterized the event as “contentious” (personal communication, June 26, 2013).

The 7 Habits training program provided the RCFD with new change language. Examples of change language often heard in a 7 Habits training session or video are: *whitewater*, which refers to a constantly turbulent environment; *big rocks/little rocks*, referring to distinguishing between important and not so important activities and goals; *clean and green*, which refers to a mentoring trust model of allowing mentees to work toward a goal in a manner best suited to their talents and resources; *paradigm shift*, which indicates a change in thinking; and *circle of concern/circle of influence*, which underscores those persons, resources, and situations over which one has a range of influence. Of the 21 interviewees who participated in the 7 Habits training, 156 specific 7 Habits language references were detected (e.g., either specifically using 7 Habits language such as paradigm shift to describe a change in thinking had occurred or by stating “that idea really messed with my head, but eventually I got it”).

The Four Primary Goals

Armed with a new structure of common guidelines, rules of engagement, and the language necessary to communicate through a change process, the RCFD leadership team

identified four primary goals that were championed by four task teams: (a) Realizing Organizational Unity, (b) Improving Communication, (c) Solidifying Structure, and (d) Updating Standard Operating Guidelines.

The process was the same for each team and followed the same problem-solving/decision-making template of idea presented/problem identified, small-group dialogue, large-group feedback, and vote by consensus. This pattern repeated over several years during which time smaller goals leading to the four metagoals were achieved. In the beginning the task-team meetings were held monthly until the teams felt they could meet quarterly. Unfortunately, at about the 2-year mark of this change process, discouragement set in as some goals became delayed and frustration set in, causing an almost complete halt. Knowing that the template always works, the Department's two initiators of the 7 Habits project focused on their circle of influence to keep moving forward wherever they could. Their trepidation eventually paid off when the Department caught its second wind and picked up where it left off.

The leadership team of the River City Fire Department ultimately learned that the process of continuous improvement through goal setting and achievement is ongoing and that because a goal is achieved does not mean the work is done, but rather that new goals are set, the process repeats, and the culture evolves. In the case of goals delayed, they also learned that other goals can be set and worked on while they waited on the stalled goal.

This learning validates Argyris and Schön's (1974) theory that once the root of the problem is determined, new behaviors can be developed.

Realizing Organizational Unity Outcomes

The Realizing Organizational Unity (ROU) team, or Unity for short, tackled the discontent of the River City Fire Department's members at its core—both sides, fire suppression and EMS not feeling validated and therefore not buying-in to the new era of the Department. They were successful in first soliciting a unanimous agreement that once back in their respective fire houses, none would tolerate negative talk from anyone about anyone and that where possible and appropriate, leadership would start to publicly praise unifying behavior. Leadership also agreed to be present more often in the various firehouses if for nothing more than to share a cup of coffee and conversation at the kitchen table. Theorists postulate that intentional, structured change requires a whole new set of learning skills and, for adults, this includes reflective practice and guided conversation about those reflections (Knowles et al., 2005; Kolb, 1983; Merriam et al., 2007; Senge, 1999).

In order to effectively confront unacceptable talk about a brother firefighter and not revert to intimidation to accomplish this particular goal, the group worked with their facilitator to learn new ways of confronting unacceptable behavior using S. Covey's (1989, pp. 239-243) empathic listening model and Kolb's (1983) reflective learning model. Leadership also empowered those in lower ranks to challenge any superior speaking against the department, city leadership, or any member of the River City Fire Department without fear of reprisal as long as that charge was warranted and delivered respectfully.

The process of changing attitudes, perceptions, and conversations was long and sometimes fraught with sabotage in the form of gossip. As Chief Foster noted, "Firemen

love to gossip; we're like a bunch of old women sometimes." However, while progress was at first haltingly made, it did pave the way for the most dramatic change impacting this organization's unification efforts. In early 2013 the EMS station was closed and the EMTs reassigned to the four firehouses. This new living situation forced each side, fire suppression and EMS, to know each other in a way that could only be accomplished by the close confines of co-habitation. The benefit of close quarters is that everyone saw each other differently and could empathize and sympathize with each other.

A recent Facebook posting on the River City Firefighters Union Local Facebook page gave kudos to a retiring EMT, one who would have been part of the merger process in 2003. The post acknowledged him as a "brother" and wished him well in retirement. The sentiment of "brother" attached to this EMT best captures the paradigm shift progress made by this task team over the long, hard road bringing about a unified spirit. In 2003 such a sentiment would most likely not have been uttered in the privacy of a firehouse, let alone in such a public format.

Improving Communication Outcomes

Working through the decision-making template laid the foundation for improved communications. Having regularly scheduled meetings, a new concept for this organization, established lines of communication never before used because members were not with each other enough, especially between firehouses, to establish relationships and networks.

Training all members in Microsoft's Outlook and the use of the city's shared drive was another first established by this task team. In doing so, the team was able to

establish a system of accountability for any member claiming ignorance of a directive or message from leadership.

Bringing the monthly Department leadership team model to the middle of the organization as a communication enhancement and mentoring model also solidified the new communication practices for the RCFD. Planting the model at this level enabled smaller issues, relevant to a particular firehouse, to be addressed using the same 7H template.

Overall, communication improved but is still acknowledged as having a long way to go. As one of this study's informants humorously pointed out, "We have better communication and our communication is awful. *It's awful*, but it's 100% better than it was."

Solidifying Structure Outcomes

The task of the Solidifying Structure team was to ensure all duties were properly covered. In doing so, they also helped bring the idea of a third platoon (or third shift) to fruition. The third platoon staffing concept is used by many fire departments and was seen as something that would alleviate the burnout situation occurring in the RCFD. It was not a new goal; the idea had been proffered under a prior leadership team but was unable to successfully move forward. Working with city officials and the leadership team, the Solidifying Structure task team played a critical role in launching the third platoon in early 2013 at about the same time as the new fire station, Station 4, was dedicated.

Another goal of this team was the acquisition of a third ambulance to serve a rapidly growing segment of River City. The third ambulance balanced out the workload

by providing a badly needed apparatus, reduced stress for the EMTs, and allowed for greater coverage for the citizens of River City.

Updating Standard Operating Guidelines Outcomes

Standard Operating Guidelines, commonly known in the firefighting profession as SOGs, are the living policy and procedure documents of the River City Fire Department covering the gamut of action and interaction within the Department from establishing the acceptable amount of facial hair, rotating equipment for servicing, career advancement requirements, the use of controlled substances, and everything in between. Prior to the start of the 7 Habits training, RCFD's leadership acknowledged the SOGs had not been consistently updated. This often caused problems between daily actions viewed by leadership as a problem that sometimes required a measure of reprimand but could not be appropriately acted upon because the necessary document to support their assessment of a situation was inadequate.

Not only was this task team able to bring the SOGs current and place them on a regular updating cycle, they expanded the goal to include a color-coded system for ease of classification with regard to importance and ramifications if violated. In order to do so, they had to collaborate with other fire departments to check their needs against prevailing best practices. Finally, binders containing all of the color-coded SOGs were distributed to each station. Prior to the 7H training, one set of SOGs resided in the Chief's office.

Data Triangulation

Yin (Yin, 2009) emphasizes triangulation of data as the hallmark of a strong case study "because the multiple sources of evidence essentially provide multiple measures of the same phenomenon" (pp. 116-117). The in-depth interviews are considered by Yin to

be a primary data source and serve as the first point of convergence in the study's data triangulation.

Next, an external rating authority in the firefighting profession, the Insurance Standard Office (ISO), showed a rating improvement during this study's time frame from just under a 3.0 (with 1.0 being the highest possible score) to a 2.0. This piece of data is presented as the second point of convergence. This particular data point also meets the qualitative study triangulation criteria provided by Marshall and Rossman (2006) as "unobtrusive data collection . . . particularly useful for triangulation" (p. 124). It provides a snapshot of the RCFD's professional progress, guided by leadership and achieved during the study's time frame.

The Standard Operating Guidelines (SOGs) are living policy documents of the River City Fire Department and as such are legal documents. Any procedural or policy change within the RCFD is legally noted in the SOGs and is reviewed by River City's legal team. Therefore, these documents, updated to reflect all changes achieved during the years 2007 through 2013, the time frame studied for the leadership initiative, serve as the third point of triangulation of evidence in this study (Yin, 2009, p. 117).

Discussion

In my work with the River City Fire Department, I discovered one of their greatest assets as an organization was their ability to be open to the creative possibilities needed to tackle any problem they encountered. Their creative problem solving was driven by a desire to serve others through professional excellence and, no doubt, co-driven by a minimal training budget—they had to be creative within existing resources.

A second discovery for me was learning about a fondness amongst this organization's members to dialogue, especially over a strong cup of firehouse coffee. Respondents shared that firefighters are known for dialogue and passionate discussion, much of which happens around a fire station's kitchen table, the cultural icon for dialogue and learning in this profession. Their innate ability to creatively problem solve, passionately discuss hard issues, and their strong desire to be the best they can be, validated my leadership construct that organizational change must be thoroughly communicated and creatively driven by all organizational members and is, ultimately, a never-ending learning and reflective cycle. Their mutual love of dialogue and debate, along with their overwhelming desire to help others, set the foundation for change.

Finding that the foundations of the Competing Values conceptual framework (Cameron & Quinn, 2011, p. 95) aligned with my construct of leadership, strengthened and encouraged this study. Cameron and Quinn's work is based on four organizational culture types: (a) Hierarchy (control), (b) Market (compete), (c) Clan (collaborate), (d) Adhocracy (creative), and helps to understand the interplay between the firefighting culture, the culture within the RCFD, and the culture of both fire and River City's leadership teams.

As an organization they possessed some measure of each of these traits and like the muscle group metaphor used herein, it was easy to identify where their strengths and weaknesses lay. In order to compete in an ever-changing world, they had to respond to the market's call for tighter and better services and to do so with no redundancy in service.

As a paramilitary organization, their hierarchy “muscle” was strong; however, its ability to dictate a successful change strategy from the top down had not been successful in the past. It was their collaborative clan nature and the creative adhocracy “muscles” that began to give the necessary strength to change and in doing so became stronger, thus starting the process of balance within the four quadrants.

Prior to the study I felt the culture of the River City Fire Department was firmly in the Hierarchy (control) model which contains “bureaucracy, rules, specialization, meritocracy, hierarchy, separate ownership, impersonality and accountability” (Cameron & Quinn, 2011, p. 42). Cameron and Quinn go on to state that such organizations hold long-term concerns such as “stability, predictability, and efficiency. Formal rules and policies hold the organization together” (p. 42). This model also aligns with the military/paramilitary span of control model. Both models, hierarchy and span of control, provide the framework praxis needed in a profession dealing with life and death issues.

Observing and assessing the organization in the present, I feel they have partially moved into the Clan (collaborate) culture, so named for its familial characteristics of “shared values and goals, cohesion, participation, individuality and a sense of ‘we’” (Cameron & Quinn, 2011, p. 46). The leadership team has found a middle ground between the two cultures which allows them to hold on to their very necessary paramilitary top-down rank structure, yet now allows for a collaborative voice to be heard. In allowing that voice to be strong and clear, they have empowered everyone in the organization to participate in the development of their fire department’s future.

Cameron and Quinn’s (2011) work is also congruent with two well-known adult learning models included in my early research, Kolb (1983) and Merriam et al.’s (2007)

experiential learning models. All three models, Cameron and Quinn (2011), Kolb (1983), and Merriam et al. (2007), use “well accepted categorical schemes that organize the way people think, their values and assumptions, and the way they process information” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 37). For the River City Fire Department, each of these points, a well-accepted categorical scheme organizing the way people think, their values and assumptions, and the way they process information were internalized and implemented through their adoption and use of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (S. Covey, 1989).

Recommendations

The case of the River City Fire Department has implications for other fire departments and emergency medical services faced with merging, for municipalities and governing boards considering the merger of these organizations in their communities, and for the current trend of merging police and fire departments to create the new breed of Public Safety Officer.

Recommendations for Other Fire Departments

The primary cause of all the problems faced by this fire department beginning from the first day in 2003 when the merger went into effect and continuing for almost 10 years thereafter was that there was no apparent strategic plan for the integration of fire suppression and emergency medical services. Additionally, municipal officials did not seek the input, nor did they gain buy-in on both sides. An elongated implementation phase, properly funded and transparently administered on all sides, would have significantly lessened the frustration, lawsuits, and anxiety felt by the members of this organization. Further, RCFD’s leadership felt abandoned by city leadership, lost in a

quagmire of confusion and hostility pouring in from all sides due to poor communication resulting in feelings of loss of respect, and lack of training to support and sustain the task at hand.

This study suggests any municipality considering such a merger is well advised to have a long-term, flexible, strategic plan in place before beginning the actual change process. Further, the development of that plan must include input and representation from all impacted. The strategic plan should be well funded, especially if a buy-out of pension funds is involved. Leadership should work closely with all involved, be transparent, not abandon anyone when problems arise, and should be quick with grace and forgiveness as those involved gain footing in the process; mistakes will occur and will need to be addressed in the moment before moving on. Setting an issue aside to consider later only creates larger issues later. It has been said that the biggest problem in the world could have been solved when it was small; words well heeded.

Finally, job descriptions and responsibilities should be carefully scrutinized so as to avoid multiple sets of rules for similar jobs (e.g., two individuals holding the same rank with different pay scales, sick time, and retirement). The focus and emphasis throughout should be centered on equality and fairness.

Recommendations for Municipalities and Governing Boards

The merger of fire suppression and emergency medical services appears to be an attractive cost-saving measure for many municipalities. In the case of a cash-strapped geographic area it is a viable idea. Properly researched, planned, supported and funded, such a move could well be a win-win all the way around. But to merge the two entities in a system that is well funded and staffed, merely to save budget dollars, may not, in the

long run, be cost effective and could result in unanticipated collateral damage. One informant to this study noted that River City's officials are typically quick to spend \$500,000 on design studies for a new road project but are not noted for "spending a single penny on something as critical as a public safety measure."

This study suggests that once all the proper steps have been developed and agreed upon by all parties for a merger, with full representation and voice (i.e., securing appropriate studies, securing adequate dollars and buy-in along with a commitment to transparency), then municipal leadership should entrust the overarching goals to the parties being merged to carry out. In doing so, they allow them, with full support, to work through the daily details because they live in those details each day and therefore know how best to navigate them.

Recommendations for Merging Police and Fire Departments

Merging police and fire departments is an emerging trend often realized in small to mid-sized communities facing budget concerns. While both entities work under the banner of public servant, they are two distinct professions with two distinct skill sets. Officials need to thoroughly understand the complex diversity of both professions. If it is felt that merging these two groups will benefit the community, then officials need to quantify those feelings to determine if doing so will actually provide better service or merely a cheaper one. Such mergers are prime examples of the law of diminishing returns. Brad acknowledged the core issue:

It is impossible to train for every situation you will meet in either field today and when you combine the two, you take away the effectiveness of the individual by reducing their knowledge, skills, and abilities to face the situation at hand no matter what role they are filling.

An example of what can go horribly wrong when a public safety officer is spread too thin occurred in the Great Lakes region of the United States. In responding to a fire call, the ill-equipped officer arrived in his patrol car, alone, and proceeded to enter a burning building (Graham, 2013). Although he was later joined by a second public safety officer, he was badly burned and lawsuits quickly followed (Bohn, 2013). With only this information provided regarding the scenario, any firefighter could quickly begin to draft a list of problems ranging from a lone respondent expected to set up a fire command at a fire ground, to the Occupational Health and Safety Administration fire scene rule stating two inside and two outside for the minimum fire scene coverage (OSHA). This study did not examine the implications on the police side of the equation, but can theorize that the issues would be just as many in number.

Recommendations for Future Study

Although this study strongly suggests that any merger be well thought out, funded, and staffed (especially with regard to entities involved in life-and-death performance outcomes), it also suggests that the merger complications experienced when two public service cultures are merged, such as in this study, can be useful in anticipating difficulties when considering merging police and fire into one entity, public safety officers. This study suggests future studies examine the process, challenges, and triumphs of the police-fire-public safety officer mergers already in place in order to determine best practices going forward. Doing so ensures past challenges and mistakes do not recur in another municipality and that all resources and efforts are fully maximized and engaged for optimal results.

Researchers may also wish to consider examining other fire departments that have merged, such as in River City, to determine additional factors and variables that may be of benefit to this profession's evolving knowledge bank.

APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL LETTERS

June 10, 2013

Lisa Greco
Tel: 574-250-5005
Email: grecol@bethelcollege.edu

RE: APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS
IRB Protocol #: 13-095 **Application Type:** Original **Dept.:** Leadership
Review Category: Expedited **Action Taken:** Approved **Advisor:** Shirley Freed
Title: The Adoption of the 7 Habits of Highly Effective People as a Leadership Tool for Organizational Change: A Qualitative Case Study of a Midwestern Fire Department from 2007-2013

This letter is to advise you that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed and approved your IRB application of research involving human subjects entitled: *“The Adoption of the 7 Habits of Highly Effective People as a Leadership Tool for Organizational Change: A Qualitative Case Study of a Midwestern Fire Department from 2007-2013”* IRB protocol number 13-095 under Expedited category. This approval is valid until June 10, 2014. If your research is not completed by the end of this period you must apply for an extension at least four weeks prior to the expiration date. We ask that you inform IRB whenever you complete your research. Please reference the protocol number in future correspondence regarding this study.

Any future changes made to the study design and/or consent form require prior approval from the IRB before such changes can be implemented. Please use the attached report form to request for modifications, extension and completion of your study.

While there appears to be no more than minimum risk with your study, should an incidence occur that results in a research-related adverse reaction and/or physical injury, this must be reported immediately in writing to the IRB. Any project-related physical injury must also be reported immediately to the University physician, Dr. Reichert, by calling (269) 473-2222. Please feel free to contact our office if you have questions.

Best wishes in your research.

Sincerely



Mordekai Ongo
Research Integrity & Compliance Officer IRB Office

Institutional Review Board - 4150 Administration Dr Room 322 - Berrien Springs, MI 49104-0355
Tel: (269) 471-6361 Fax: (269) 471-6543 E-mail: irb@andrews.edu

Andrews University

Institutional Review Board
(269) 471-6361 Fax: (269) 471-6246 E-mail: irb@andrews.edu
Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI 49104-0355

August 25, 2010

Lisa Barnes Greco
2838 Fir Lane
South Bend, IN 46615
Tel: 574-250-5005

RE: APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS
IRB Protocol #: 10-069 **Application Type:** Original **Dept:** Leadership
Review Category: Exempt **Action Taken:** Approved **Advisor:** Sylvia Gonzalez
Title: The Adoption of the 7 Habits of Highly Effective People and Its Effect on Training Paradigm Shift:
A Case Study of a Municipal Fire Department

This letter is to advise you that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) has approved phase one only of your application for research project titled: *The adoption of the 7 Habits of highly effective people and its effect on training paradigm shift: A case study of a municipal fire department*. We have assigned a protocol number (10-069) and ask that you refer to this protocol number in any future correspondence. The duration of this approval is for one year. If your research is not completed by the end of this period you must apply for an extension. You are required to apply for approval of phase two.

Any future changes made to the study design and/or consent form require prior approval from the IRB before such changes can be implemented.

While there appears to be no risks with your phase one of the study, should an incidence occur which results in a research-related adverse reaction and/or physical injury, this must be reported immediately in writing to the IRB. Any project-related physical injury must also be reported immediately to the University physician, Dr. Loren Hamel, by calling (269) 473-2222.

We wish you success as you start your research project as outlined in the approved protocol.

Please feel free contact our office if you have questions.

Best wishes in your research.

Sarah Kimakwa

Sarah Kimakwa
Administrative Assistant
Office of Research & Creative Scholarship

APPENDIX B

REQUEST TO INTERVIEW LETTER

Date:

Name:

My name is Lisa Barnes Greco. I will be conducting research with adults over the age of 21 who are willing, of free choice, to share their thoughts, opinions and observations of and about the organizational culture in the [REDACTED] (known for purposes of this study as the River City Fire Department). This research will be in fulfillment for the purpose of completing my PhD in Leadership and Administration from the School of Education at Andrews University.

The purpose of this research is to describe and understand the process by which this fire department changed their organizational culture during a merger process. Your participation in the study will help other fire departments to better understand how and why organizational change is prompted, processed and solidified in order to improve departmental culture and thus, performance results.

The study requires approximately one hour of time for a face-to-face interview (unless you choose to be interviewed for a longer period of time) and will be audio recorded. The interview will take place in private, comfortable surroundings. You will be allowed to review the transcript of the interview to validate and / or correct the written, transcribed information.

By your participation in the study there will be no implied liability whether oral or written of your legal rights. Your participation in this study is voluntary and will be protected by use of a pseudonym. Refusal to participate in the study will involve no penalties, repercussion or loss of benefits to which you are entitled. Your identity in this study will not be disclosed in any published documents and there will be no cost to you for participating in this study. You will not receive any monetary compensation or other type of inducement for participating in this study.

You may contact my advisor, Dr. Shirley Freed, or any impartial third party not associated with this study, regarding any issue you may have about the study. Dr. Freed is available at Andrews University, School of Education, Bell Hall, Suite # 173, Berrien Springs, MI 49104 or call (269) 471-3475 for information and assistance.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please respond to this request within one week of the date of this letter so that a time and place for your interview may be scheduled.

Thank you.

Lisa Barnes Greco
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South Bend, In 46615
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APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Andrews University

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

The purpose of this study is to describe and understand how a Midwestern fire department navigated organizational change.

_____ I have been told that Lisa Barnes Greco will be conducting research with adult individuals who are willing, of free choice, to share their thoughts, opinions and observations regarding the merger of fire suppression and emergency medical services in the [REDACTED]. This research will be in partial fulfillment for the purpose of completing her doctoral degree in Leadership and Administration from the School of Education at Andrews University.

_____ I have been told that the purpose of the research is to describe and better understand the change process as it occurred in this particular fire department due to the merger of EMS and fire services.

_____ I have been told that my participation in the study will benefit other fire departments and similarly structured organizations with regard to merging organizations.

_____ I have been told the study requires a short period of my time, approximately one hour for a face-to-face interview (unless I choose to be interviewed for a longer period of time) to be audio recorded and that the interview will take place in a private, comfortable surroundings. I have been told that I will be able to review my interview transcript aka *member check* it to validate the written, transcribed information.

_____ I have been told that by my participation in this study there will be no implied liability whether oral or written of my legal rights.

_____ I acknowledge that my participation in this study is fully voluntary. I have been told that refusal to participate in the study will involve no penalties, repercussion, or loss of benefits to which I may be entitled.

_____ I have been told that my identity in this study will be protected by a pseudonym throughout and that my rightful name will not be disclosed in any published documents without my expressed, written permission, and that all audio recordings will be stored in dual secure locations for three years.

_____ I have been told that there will be no cost to me for participating in this study.

_____ I have been told that I will not receive any monetary compensation or other type of inducement for participating in this study.

_____ I have been told that I may contact Lisa's advisor, Dr. Shirley Freed, or any impartial third party not associated with this study regarding any issue that I may have about the study. I may contact her at Andrews University, School of Education, Bell Hall, Suite # 173, Berrien Springs, MI 49104 or call (269) 471-3475 for information and assistance.

_____ I have read the contents of this consent form and received from Lisa Barnes Greco and received verbal explanations to any questions I had. My questions concerning this study have been answered to my satisfaction. I hereby give voluntary consent to participate in this study. I am fully aware that if I have any additional question or concerns that I may contact Lisa Barnes Greco in writing at her home address, 2838 Fir Lane, South Bend, IN, 4615 or by email at GrecoL@BethelCollege.edu, or phone at 574.250.5005.

_____ I have been given a copy of this consent.

Signature / Date

Witness / Date

I have reviewed the contents of this form with the interviewee by whose signature above indicates that I have explained the potential risks and benefits of the study, and that I have answered all questions to the interviewee's satisfaction.

Signature of Investigator / Telephone / Date

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

PROJECT: The purpose of this research is to describe the process by which a fire department initiates processes and implements organizational change. Your participation will help other firefighters better understand how the culture of firefighting impacts organizational change and performance outcomes.

This face-to-face interview will take one hour to conduct, but if you (the interviewee) wish to continue longer, and at the discretion of the interviewer (Lisa Barnes Greco), the interview will continue. Any further questions arising from the initial questions will remain within the framework of the research.

START TIME OF INTERVIEW:

END TIME OF INTERVIEW:

LENGTH OF INTERVIEW:

DATE:

PLACE:

INTERVIEWER: Lisa Barnes Greco

INTERVIEWEE (Pseudonym):

QUESTIONS: For Individual Firefighters and Emergency Medical Personnel

1. Please briefly introduce yourself by rank, length of time you have been a firefighter, where you are currently stationed and what your primary job role is.
2. Please tell me about your indoctrination experiences as a member of this department.
3. What, if anything, has changed in this fire department since 2007? Please explain.
4. What are your observations regarding how the merger of EMS and fire suppression were handled?
5. Did you participate in the 7 Habits for Highly Successful People training?
6. In what ways was the training beneficial / not beneficial to you? The department?
7. In what way(s), if any, has the department changed over the last six years? To what factors do you attribute the change?
8. Is there anything else you would like to share about the merger?

QUESTIONS: For the Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Chief

1. Please briefly introduce yourself by rank, length of time you have been an EMT, where you are currently stationed, and what your primary job role is.
2. What are your observations regarding the merger of EMS and fire suppression?
3. Did you participate in the 7 Habits for Highly Successful training?
4. If yes, in what ways was the training beneficial / not beneficial to you? The Department?
5. Tell me the ways and to what degree, the EMS was included in the merger architecture and planning process.
6. Do you feel the merger was successful or not successful? Please explain.
7. Is there anything else you would like to share about the merger?

QUESTIONS: For the Mayor and Fire Chief

1. Please tell me how the merger of EMS and fire suppression came about.
2. Tell me the ways and to what degree, the EMS was included in the merger architecture and planning process.
3. What factor(s) prompted you to agree to allow two lower ranking firefighters to move ahead with a leadership initiative to guide the merger / change process?
4. What are your thoughts regarding the use of The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People as a departmental tool for common guidelines and language during the last six years? Please explain.
5. How would you describe the pre-merger organizational culture in this fire department before the 2007?
6. How would you describe the post-merger culture today?
7. Is there anything else you would like to share about the merger?

FOCUS GROUP

QUESTIONS: For Firefighters and Emergency Medical Personnel

1. Please briefly introduce yourself by rank, length of time you have been a firefighter / EMT, where you are currently stationed and what your primary job role is.
2. Please tell me about your indoctrination / orientation experiences as a member of this department.
3. What are your observations re: the merger process of EMS and fire suppression?
4. What, if anything, has changed with regard to how leadership addresses problems in this fire department since 2007? Please explain.
5. Did any of you participate in the 7 Habits for Highly Successful People training?
6. (If yes) In what ways was the training beneficial / not beneficial to you? The department?
7. (If no) What leadership or mentoring training / experiences have you had?
8. In what way(s), if any, is the department different since you first came on duty? To what factor(s) do you attribute the change(s)?
9. In what ways have you been encouraged to move up in the department?
10. In what ways are you encouraged to bring solutions forward and champion them in this department?
11. Is there anything we have not covered today that you would like to share about how this department has developed / changed from 2007 to now?

Thank you for your participation and cooperation in this interview. The confidentiality of your personal information is of utmost importance.

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Emotional Intelligence as a Leadership Tool

Indiana Fire Instructors Association, Michigan City, IN January 31, 2014
Building a Leadership Program for the Middle

Midwest Scholars Conference, Indianapolis, IN March 4, 2011
Casting Visions through Personal Stories: Motivating
Adult Students at the Heart Level