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Implementing and Managing Change in the Fire Service

by
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of the requirements of a
Masters of Public Administration

Submitted August 31, 1993

THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGING

... For he who gets hurt
will be he who has stalled
the battle outside raging

We'll soon shake your windows
and rattle your walls
For the times they are a-changing.

Bob Dylan (The Times They are A-Changing)

There is no doubt that the times are changing. The environments within which organizations go on about their business are changing at an ever increasing pace and the issues are becoming more and more complex. The windows and walls of fire halls across North America are rattling from the repercussions of societal changes that they once thought themselves impervious to. Fire fighters and fire department managers who are turning a blind eye to these changes or, worse yet, trying to "stall the battle outside raging" are going to be the leaders of outdated, ineffective fire departments. Even more likely, they stand the risk of being replaced by administrators from outside of the fire service who can meet future challenges because of their knowledge of organizational dynamics and the changes in the environment within which fire departments operate.

Why this growing fascination with change and change management? Nearly every trade journal regularly carries articles on change and the challenges of the future. The fire service is impacted by the same forces that are causing other organizations to recognize and deal with change. A comparison of a list of change issues from a traditional business perspective and from a leader in the fire service would show

that, although different degrees of importance may be placed on individual issues, the lists of concerns are indeed very similar.

Both lists would mention such organizational concerns as rapid technological changes, computerization, management of information, employment equity, health and safety in the workplace, the new generation of employees who bring new attitudes into the workplace, society's changing demographics, dwindling resources, multi-culturalism, human rights issues, employee demands for participation in the workplace, restructuring, downsizing and so the list goes on.

The number of changes that organizations must endure in order to remain stable and/or grow in today's business environment is beyond precise calculation. The frequency of change is accelerating as never before, and the forces of change increasingly bombard organizations from all directions. No aspect of human existence appears immune to this constant bombardment. The economic, political, educational and organizational foundations of our culture currently are under extreme stress. No area of our lives is in greater transition because of these influences, however, than the work setting. Because of this, the skills for coping effectively with a changing work environment are fast becoming essential survival tools for all organizations. ¹

Fire departments are organizations that usually function within the public sector and normally form part of the service provided at the local government level. Fire departments are subject to the same organizational dynamics and experiences as would be expected in most businesses, services and agencies that function within an organizational framework.

There are those in the fire service who would argue that much of the organizational theory, modelling and analysis that has recently come to

the forefront of organizational studies, both academically and at the practitioner level, has limited relevancy to fire departments and the provision of fire protection within a community. It is suggested that the unique "business" of fire departments, the nature of the job and a common dedication to the traditions of the service, create an exclusivity that reduces the relevance of organizational approaches to managing a fire department.

While fire departments may have a unique combination of authority, responsibilities and services to provide and, subsequently, unique organizational structures and cultures, managers of fire departments and leaders in the fire service can benefit immensely from a better understanding of organizational dynamics and processes. This is particularly true regarding the implementation and management of change in the fire service.

The body of this paper is built upon the premise that fire chiefs and other managers within fire departments must develop a thorough understanding of their department as an organization, and a broad perspective on the variety of theories and models for initiating and managing change if they are to continue to provide fire protection to their communities efficiently and effectively in an era of rapid change.

The approach will be to assess the need for change management in the fire service, review the traditional organizational structure and culture of fire departments, discuss current theories and models of change management in organizations and relate these models to change issues critical to the fire service. Finally, the paper will examine the potential that strategic planning offers as a tool for anticipating, identifying and successfully managing change within the fire service.

Adapting to Change

It is apparent from a scan of the current state-of-readiness of today's fire service that, as a general rule, fire departments have adapted to changes in technology. In a relatively short period of time, the fire service embraced the changes from hand-pumpers to steam engines through to the modern, specialized fire apparatus. Fire fighters themselves quickly accepted the increased protection offered through the development of self-contained breathing apparatus and improved fire fighting clothing. Municipal fire departments were quick to make use of the new fire retardant materials and other related developments that were part of NASA's space programs.

Most of the foregoing types of changes could be incorporated into practice without too much resistance because the benefits were relatively obvious and presented little need to "change" at the deeper levels of the organization's existence. New challenges currently facing the fire service have much stronger impacts on the culture and structure of the organization. Multi-culturalism, employment equity and the different "attitudes" of younger employees have the potential to radically change the traditional "image" of the fire service. Such changes are bound to meet strong resistance and will test the human management skills of fire department supervisors and managers. Again, it will be useful to those persons charged with the responsibility of running a modern fire department to have a good understanding of their departments as organizations and as organizations undergoing dramatic change.

Changing Mission

Since the early 1960's, the fire service has experienced a significant expansion in the types of services it is expected to provide to the

community. Today, most fire departments provide some degree of response to chemical spills or accidents, the extrication and rescue of persons trapped in vehicles or collapsed structures and emergency medical response. These additional responsibilities require not only extra skills and training but a broader perspective of the role of a fire fighter by those hired into the job. As the mission of an organization changes, management must ensure that those working "in the field" receive the required training and other support mechanisms to successfully accomplish the new tasks dictated by the change in mission.

A change of mission has occurred since the early days when fire departments were viewed essentially as combat organizations, focusing an inordinate amount of resources, time, attention, and training on fire suppression operations. Although the need to maintain a strong combat capability has never diminished, especially in densely populated areas, the mission has slowly evolved in the direction of providing overall fire protection, not just suppression. The addition of duties such as emergency medical services in many communities has modified firefighter training and even the type of individual who seeks fire service as employment. The addition of fire prevention duties and the expansion of the role of code enforcement has changed the mission of many organizations to a proactive instead of reactive one. The rapid increase in hazardous materials incidents has shifted the focus in the combat arm away from fire to dealing with a highly technical field of hazardous materials containment. Sometimes the mission statement of the organization has not been modified to reflect such changes. As a result, many fire service employees find themselves doing a job that is totally different from what they hired on to do. ²

Like all organizations, fire departments encounter the need to change and adapt. Forces of change come from sources internal and external to the organization.

It is useful to examine in more detail some of the internal and external

key issues that are currently exerting pressure on fire departments to change the ways in which they conduct their business.

External Change Issues

There are four general trends in society that are affecting the fire department as a workplace. There is the need for fiscal constraint as a result of diminishing resources available within the community for fire protection. Government agencies and fire fighters' unions are advocating an intense scrutiny of the fire service from an occupational health and safety perspective. Employment equity initiatives and human rights issues are dramatically altering the ways in which fire departments must hire, train and manage their human resources. Local interest groups and tax-watch coalitions are demanding greater accountability of the use of resources funding fire protection within communities, while at the same time, the community in general has rising expectations of the types of services that fire fighters should provide.

Economic Constraints

The provision of fire protection is one of the most expensive services that local governments provide. The equipment and apparatus required to deal with emergencies is expensive and the operations are labour intensive. Typically, ninety to ninety-five percent of a municipal fire department's budget funds the salaries and benefits of fire department personnel. A decrease in resource allocation to fire department operations can significantly impact the number of personnel that the department can deliver to an emergency scene. This forces fire chiefs to constantly investigate new methods and technology to enable their departments to deal with emergencies with less than the desirable number

of personnel at the scene. Innovations in methodology and new technologies must be accepted by firefighters if the new approach is to be used effectively and efficiently. An understanding of change management is important to the successful implementation of new approaches to doing business in any organization and the fire service is no different.

Health and Safety Issues

Fire fighter occupational health and safety issues are becoming a focal point in fire department operations for government agencies responsible for these issues and for the leaders of fire fighters' unions. Although it is still recognized that there are dangers inherent in emergency work, an increased emphasis is being placed on the provision of safe equipment and on training for safety on the fire ground. This is forcing fire ground commanders to reassess traditional fire ground tactics and to implement risk assessment practices in order to accommodate this increased emphasis on safety. It also forces a redefinition of the image of the fire fighter rushing into a situation "against all odds". For those who hold this "self-image", acceptance of a change in the way things are done requires changes in the individual's basic attitude. Effecting these kinds of changes across the organization requires good change management skills at all levels within the department. Fire fighters will have to "buy into" the fact that they are responsible to perform safely. Managers and supervisors will have to take into account the safety perspective during emergencies and in day-to-day activities.

Employment Equity

Employment equity is a major force that is causing fire chiefs and

firefighters to rethink many of the assumptions and traditions about the "way things are done" in the fire service. Hiring practices, employment standards, training methods and fire station design and equipment are currently under review in many departments. All that was once appropriate to a white male dominated profession must be redefined in light of a new and diversified workforce. Employment equity initiatives hit at the heart of organizations such as fire departments, where strong emphasis is placed on tradition and conservative values.

Fire departments have traditionally been seen as the domain of white males and, as such, have developed a culture that has assimilated many of the belief and value systems from North American society of the early and middle 1900's. Changes in the make up of Canadian society are forcing fire service personnel to deal with different cultural belief and value systems, both within departments, and in their interactions with the general public.

The make up of the pool of candidates that the fire service draws on for recruitment is changing as a result of general changes in society. Visible minorities made up only 2% of total immigration from 1900 to 1945. However, between 1981 and 1986, visible minorities accounted for 60% of the immigrants entering Canada.³ In light of Canada's declining birthrate, sustaining a competitive workforce and economy will require significant numbers of immigrants in the latter part of this century. This will increase cultural diversity in society and the workplace.

In addition to the change in the make up of the workforce, it has been recognized that designated groups have been restricted in their opportunities to enter into higher paying jobs.⁴ Initiatives to correct this imbalance will force fire departments to ensure that their employment systems are "open" if they are to be in a position to take

advantage of qualified and capable candidates from Canada's "cultural mosaic".

The formal and informal rules, values and beliefs that make up the culture of an organization work to ensure stability within the organization. Because of the uncertainty of the emergency situations and risks that firefighters face, there is a certain inherent tendency to seek stability for the organization itself. Loyalty and adherence to the cultural elements that provide this sense of stability can also create strong resistance to change. This is particularly true regarding changes that affect the organization's culture.

Successful implementation of employment equity initiatives will be accomplished most easily by fire service leaders who understand organizational culture and related change issues. Because this is a current issue and is intricately to fire department culture, we will return to employment equity in the fire service in more detail when fire department culture and change is discussed later in the paper.

Changing Roles

The role of the firefighter in the community is changing. The variety of services provided by fire departments is becoming increasingly more complex. Management of hazardous materials emergencies, such as chemical spills and leaks, requires a significantly different approach than is traditionally found in the fire service. Carefully thought out procedures, a thorough understanding of the potential hazards of the situation and access to equipment and procedures required to resolve the situation present fire service leaders with a risk assessment package that is different from that of a "simple" structure fire. The public's expectations of the fire department's capabilities, fed by the media

images of emergency responders, are constantly increasing. Rising expectations often exist in conjunction with increasing demands by the taxpayer that fire service leaders account for the efficient use of the resources provided. It is no longer accepted at face value that fire chiefs know what is needed and what is best. Closer scrutiny means that firefighters and fire chiefs are being held accountable for their actions and can no longer live by reputation alone. This necessitates changes at the planning stage and in the actual management of an incident. Accurate and detailed reporting mechanisms are necessary to enable analysis of departmental operations in the event of a lawsuit or other legal actions taken against a department. Detailed analysis of expenditures are needed to justify each year's budget. Much of this emphasis on accountability, administration and planning flies directly in the face of both new recruits who chose to enter this adventurous, action oriented profession and of experienced firefighters who grew up believing that their actions and their use of public resources could be justified solely on the basis of necessity alone.

Closer public scrutiny and criticism means that fire service leaders will have to take a closer look at how things are done and make changes where needed. Some changes will be simple and can be accomplished easily by means of a top-down management directive. Others will require a "buy in" from the field level. Successful change management requires a thorough understanding of the change process by the organization's leaders. Failure to understand organizational change dynamics frequently results in failure to implement and manage change.

We seem to believe that the merits of change will be obvious and therefore, will be automatically accepted by the people involved. In many cases, such changes are resisted or seen as totally unacceptable by employees. ⁵

In the business world it is an all too familiar story where senior management pushes all the right strategic buttons at the top of the organization to initiate a required change, but at the bottom nothing happens. The result is usually frustration in the executive suite, disillusionment on the part of the middle management, loss of confidence in the corporate leadership, wasted effort and resources, lost opportunities, staff casualties or even sometimes organizational casualties. ⁶

Fire departments often witness similar scenarios as those experienced in the business world. A good idea is developed and entered into the stream of activities of a fire department for all the right reasons, and yet, it becomes a victim of resistance to change. For example, it would seem self evident to anyone concerned with health and safety issues that the development of a self-contained breathing apparatus, designed to protect firefighters from heart and lung diseases associated with exposure to the toxic atmosphere found at fire scenes would be used automatically by every firefighter. Yet, every fire department will have a number of firefighters who prefer the "tough guy" image of yesterday's "smoke-eaters" and they will reluctantly make use of breathing equipment. A new way to perform a particular procedure may mean a safer and more effective operation but it will inevitably be resisted by some in the department who prefer the old way of doing things. If these resistors are influential enough, in the long run they can manage to scuttle even the best of ideas.

Typical Organizational Structures of Fire Departments

In order to understand organizational change it is important to understand both the structure of an organization and its culture. Both aspects are important when attempting to implement change. One school of thought on change management may place the most emphasis on assessment of

the organization's structure while another places more emphasis on the impact of organizational culture on change initiatives. However, it is understood that the structure and culture of an organization do not exist in isolation from each other. One particular change issue may best be addressed as a "structural" issue and another may be seen as a cultural issue. Successful implementation of the desired change will probably involve varying degrees of both structural and cultural aspects. It is useful to spend some time taking a look at the formal organizational structures traditionally found in the fire service separate from an analysis of the cultural components of a fire department.

Fire Department Structure

Fire departments come in all shapes and sizes. A department may operate on a full-time paid basis, on a strictly volunteer basis or use a combination of paid and volunteer personnel commonly referred to as a composite department. The community's size, either in population or geographical coverage area, will impact the size of the organization and the number of fire halls required. A fire department may operate out of a single station or may involve 20 or more stations in larger urban areas.

Fire departments traditionally operate on a quasi-military basis, meaning there is a definite hierarchical management system. Although there are defined, formal positions, there are limited layers in the structure. Fire chiefs may sit at the top of the chain of command but, in all but the largest municipal departments, the chief still performs at an operational level on occasion. Fire chiefs respond to alarms and often take charge of the operations.

The formal structure of an organization is commonly found in an organizational flow chart. Appendix A contains a sample of the types of

flow charts found in the fire service. Flow charts also indicate the formal relationships found in the fire department and indicate the formal reporting functions, lines of authority and communication networks.

The structure of an organization reflects the way in which the organization has chosen to arrange the division of work and the co-ordination of activities necessary to achieve the objectives of the organization. ⁷ The structure reflects three dimensions: complexity, formalization and centralization. ⁸

Complexity

According to Stephen Robbins, the complexity of an organization has three aspects - horizontal differentiation, vertical differentiation and spatial differentiation. ⁹ Horizontal differentiation refers to the diversity found in roles and tasks of employees. That is, how diversified is the educational and occupational background of employees, how varied are the types of jobs performed and what is the orientation of each employee to the purpose of the organization? The need for specialization, departmentalization, differing goal orientations and scheduling requirements all combine to increase the complexity of the organizational structure. Communications and co-ordination of activities become more difficult as the horizontal differentiation of the organization increases.

Vertical differentiation refers to the number of layers that form the hierarchy of the organization. As work is divided into smaller parts, it often becomes necessary to add to the organization's hierarchy in an effort to co-ordinate the increased diversity of activities. An increase in vertical differentiation is usually in response to an increased horizontal differentiation.

Spatial differentiation is the third element affecting an organization's degree of complexity. It is simply the number of geographical locations that its personnel operate from. The higher the degree of spatial differentiation, the more difficult it is to communicate, co-ordinate and ensure standardization of activities and to implement change in a consistent manner across the organization.

The traditional organizational structure of a fire department has evolved through a long history. The provision of fire protection is one of the oldest public services. The first organized fire fighting force was established in Rome by Augustus Caesar around 23 B.C. The organization of fire protection in North America can be traced to the early 1600's.¹⁰ Initial efforts were focused on the organization of people to fight fires that might occur. A military model was used to establish the clear lines of authority and command structure necessary to manage emergency situations. This structure became the model on which fire department's are organized.

Much of the success of the traditional organization was due to its simple function and structure. Because fire suppression was the primary service, it was relatively easy to organize resources and assign authority and responsibility. Efficient performance at the emergency scene was the criterion for success, and the organizational structure was designed to achieve it. Thus, the fire company became the basic building block of the fire service.¹¹

This quasi-military approach is still the predominant system used in modern fire departments because it is still important to maintain clear lines of authority and a strong chain of command structure when dealing with emergencies. However, as noted, the roles of firefighters and the services provided by modern fire departments are expanding. Fire prevention specialists, hazardous materials experts and public education

programs are examples of the increasing horizontal differentiation in many fire departments. Vertical differentiation has not increased as dramatically in the fire service as one might expect. The hierarchical levels have remained relatively flat because fire chiefs and upper management personnel still perform at the operational level. In Ontario, through the Fire Department Act, it is provincially mandated that only the Fire Chief and Deputy Fire Chief can be excluded from the bargaining unit. Thus fire department organizational charts usually show a relatively flat structure that results in a centralized decision making arrangement.

As mentioned earlier, fire departments operate out of a number of fire halls spread throughout a given geographical area. Personnel assigned to these halls also work shift work, thereby increasing the degree of spatial differentiation that results initially from the department's geographical dispersion of its workforce.

Structurally, fire departments are relatively complex. Complexity increases with the addition of more services and with the size of the area to be provided with fire protection. Successful change implementation and management requires good communication, employee participation and support and good control of the process by management. Communication, participation and monitoring become increasingly difficult as organizations increase in complexity. It is critical that fire service leaders understand the need to recognize and deal with the problems associated with operating within a complex organizational environment if they are to be successful in managing change.

Formalization

Formalization refers to the degree of standardization of jobs, activities

and behaviour. ¹² It also refers to the means by which standardization is achieved through such measures as rules and regulations, formal policies and standard operating procedures.

Fire departments, like other organizations based on a quasi-military format, are highly formalized. They are built on a traditional or "rational" management model. ¹³ Much of Weber's work on "bureaucracy" is relevant to the management principles and models used in structuring a fire department. "Elements of the 'bureaucratic' approach certainly exist in the paramilitary structure of the fire service. Clear lines of authority, specific goals and objectives, and a functional hierarchy are useful principles when applied to the delivery of emergency services". ¹⁴

Standard Operating Procedures are found in every fire department. Although the names by which they are referred to may vary from department to department (ie. Officer's Handbook, Operational Guidebook), they nevertheless serve the purpose of indicating the way things will be done.

From an operational perspective, standardization of the way of managing the variety of situations that emergency responders may encounter has obvious advantages. Standard operation procedures serve to reduce uncertainty when fast decisions must be made and quick action undertaken. They are developed based on experience and analysis of how best to handle any given situation.

"... standard operating procedures, embodied in the policy manual or handbook (under whatever title the organization uses), direct the worker how to perform those tasks. Standard operating procedures represent the organization's repository of wisdom on the most appropriate response to specific situations." ¹⁵

Standardization of operations makes the management of emergencies and

even the day-to-day operations of a fire department more manageable. However, fire department leaders must ensure that the standard way of doing things remains relevant in today's world. It has been said that tradition is something we keep on doing long after we have lost the original reason for doing it. Fire department managers must ensure that standard operating procedures are as relevant today as when they were first developed by providing a mechanism through which they are regularly reviewed by those who use them. This serves the purpose of keeping standard procedures relevant. Just as importantly, it allows today's users the opportunity to participate in the ongoing development of procedures they regularly use. This opportunity to participate can assist in developing a sense of ownership and commitment to standard operating procedures and subsequent commitment to the overall department objectives.

Formalization serves one other purpose for fire departments. It provides protection in the event that the actions of the department are called into question. When one considers the range of situations that firefighters are called upon to manage and the extreme conditions that may be encountered, a formalized method of dealing with similar situations minimizes discretion and uncertainty about how they should be handled. Although this is particularly relevant to emergency response, it is becoming increasingly important to the enforcement activities of fire departments. Fire departments will experience increasing pressure to standardize their operations as their actions come under more scrutiny from taxpayers, the legal system and senior government agencies.

At the same time as there exists this imposing requirement to formalize, individual members of the public and employees within the fire service are demanding recognition of, and response to, their individual needs and rights. Fire service leaders will continue to be confronted with the need to implement and manage change as the need to accommodate

individuality struggles against the need for a relatively high degree of formalization.

Centralization

Centralization is the degree to which decision making is concentrated in a single position within an organization. ¹⁶ Centralization of decision making has two aspects - the legitimate authority of the particular position to make a decision and the power of the person in the position to ensure that a decision is implemented. ¹⁷ Typically, public service agencies tend to be highly centralized. Administrative decision making and policy implementation is usually performed by senior managers. Generally then, it can be stated that "... most public agencies appear to be moderately to highly centralized, because control over routine administrative functions, such as budgeting, purchasing, and personnel, is usually not left to the discretion of lower-level management." ¹⁸

Public administration theory has long debated the dichotomy that exists between politics and administration. In theory, senior bureaucrats should be closer to the political intent of policies and standard operating procedures, and so, there has been a tendency over the long run to maximize control and minimize discretion in an attempt to ensure the public perception of everyone getting fair and equitable treatment. Centralization of decision making increases consistency of application.

Two aspects of fire department structure would indicate a very centralized decision making process. The typical organizational chart has front line fire officers reporting at only one or two levels below the chief. Secondly, there is a preponderance of rules and regulations. However, it should be noted that individual officers on shift in the fire halls have considerable authority at emergency scenes and in day-to-day

activities. This means that front line officers in the fire service need to be supportive of decisions that effect change if the actual implementation of the desired change is to be successful.

The three aspects of formalization, centralization and complexity determine how mechanistic or organic the organization is. Fire departments are commonly perceived to be mechanistic bureaucracies. 19

The work of firefighters is also frequently portrayed as glamorous, but it too is carried out within the confines of a paramilitary bureaucracy with rules and specified procedures governing every aspect of the work situation. ...

... To its members, a well-run machine bureaucracy offers order, stability, predictability, and clear expectations of duties, authority, responsibility, and behavior. Ambiguities about status and prestige are nonexistent. Exprit de corps, a sense of belonging, an opportunity to identify with something beyond the individual are intrinsic to many machine bureaucracies. Perhaps people should not want these things, but many people do and thus find working in these bureaucracies a comforting and satisfying experience.

Machine bureaucracies do emphasize specialization, and their standard operating procedures are a distillation of the organization's experience at handling the problem situations it has repeatedly confronted. For many situations, this does maximize efficiency and effectiveness. There probably is "one best way" to fight fires, and if it has been discovered, then it makes sense to follow it. As much as any organizational form can, machine bureaucracies stress uniformity, competence, and fairness. 20

It is important for fire service leaders to understand the level of formalization, centralization and the complexity of their particular organization when they attempt to introduce change. Although fire departments are formally structured in a mechanistic, quasi-military format, it should be recognized that the model upon which fire

departments have been built originated in fire companies whose primary purpose was dealing with emergency situations. As roles change, it may be possible to broaden this management approach to allow for greater opportunity for employee participation in decision making. Fire department leaders may want to consider using a matrix or team approach to implement change where appropriate.

The traditional approach has influenced the structure and management of many organizations, fire departments included. Managers often set out to establish a 'rational model' to direct the group toward a desired end. They normally do this by establishing organizational goals and objectives, on the assumption that employees will internalize organizational values and work to accomplish the objectives.

In the fire service, particularly in suppression and emergency activities, traditional principles have worked well. As the fire service assumes responsibility for such services as fire prevention and public education, however, the traditional model falls short, and managers need to borrow from other schools as well. 21

Even in the development of standard operating procedures that are used at emergency scenes, it is possible to provide opportunities for employee input at the developmental stage. An opportunity to say how and what should be done at emergencies prior to the actual incident will increase employee commitment to standard methods and decrease confusion and uncertainty at the emergency. A common problem at emergency scenes is "freelancing". Freelancing occurs when firefighters follow their own instincts and ideas about what should be done next. At emergencies it is important to maintain control and co-ordination of all activities. This is critical in order to ensure safe and effective operations. Firefighters are action oriented and the tightening up on control of their actions at an emergency is often difficult for "experienced" firefighters to accept. Employee participation in the development of these control measures will gain commitment from all levels of operations

at an emergency and increase understanding of the need for these changes.

Fire service leaders need to have a good working knowledge of organizational theories in order to understand their organizations and the dynamics that will occur when they attempt to introduce change.

Organizational Culture

One of the greatest challenges facing organization management is ensuring that individuals within the organization have accepted, and hopefully are committed to, the dominant values, norms, and culture of the organization. Some contemporary organizational theorists would go one step further and contend that managing culture is the single most important responsibility of organization leadership. To them, managing culture means controlling and manipulating the culture of the organization so that productivity and organizational commitment are emphasized as central values and internalized by all workers. ²²

To understand organizational culture and why it is so important to management in the fire service we need to define what culture is, discuss why it is such an influential force in organizations and identify some cultural aspects that are specific to the fire service.

Edward H. Schein provides a formal definition of organizational culture.

Organizational culture is the pattern of basic assumptions that a given group has invented, discovered, or developed in learning to cope with its problems of external adaptation or internal integration, and that have worked well enough to be considered valid, and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. ²³

The key points in Schein's definition are that an organization's culture essentially provides a mechanism to cope with changes in its external

environment; facilitates internal integration of changes; and the organization's assumptions, values and beliefs must be taught to new members.

Stephen Robbins identifies seven characteristics that define the essence of an organization's culture. Robbins says that organizational culture represents a common perception held by the organization's members about these seven characteristics. ²⁴ The seven characteristics are:

1. Individual autonomy - the degree of responsibility, independence, and opportunities for exercising initiative that individuals in the organization have
2. Structure - the degree of rules and regulations, and the amount of direct supervision, that is used to oversee and control employee behavior
3. Support - the degree of assistance and warmth managers provide for their subordinates
4. Identity - the degree to which members identify with the organization as a whole rather than with their particular work group or field of professional expertise
5. Performance-reward - the degree to which reward allocations in the organization (salary increases, promotions) are based on employee performance criteria
6. Conflict tolerance - the degree of conflict present in relationships between peers and work groups as well as the willingness to be honest and open about difference
7. Risk-tolerance - the degree to which employees are encouraged to be aggressive, innovative, and risk-seeking ²⁵

Robbin's approach to organizational culture suggests that it is how the members of an organization "perceive" the organization in terms of these

seven characteristics that can determine the commitment to the overall or dominant culture of the organization.

It is also recognized that complex organizations may experience a proliferation of sub-cultures. Closer identification with a particular sub-culture rather than the overall organizational culture can result in a disjointed work force making change intervention more difficult, particularly corporate wide changes. This is particularly important to remember in assessing fire department culture because of the dispersion of the work force into sub-groups throughout a municipality. Fire station crews operate in an environment in which members spend a lot of time working closely together. This creates situations in which all of the influences that operate within group behaviour dynamics exist and, so, sub-group influences are particularly active within the overall organizational culture.

An organization's culture is expressed through it's symbols, myths, ceremonial rites, norms and attitudes towards the internal organization itself and towards individuals, groups and organizations in the external environment. Some organizations use physical symbols to portray their culture. "Physical manifestations of culture are found in the symbols, slogans and logos that embody the essence of the organization and how it wishes to be portrayed." ²⁶ Fire departments use symbols such as uniforms, rank insignia and traditionally decorated vehicles to emphasize the tradition, dedication and formality that form an integral part of fire service culture.

Strong cultures provide stability to an organization. A widespread acceptance of the corporate culture ensures that the behaviour of individual members will be consistent with the overall goals and objectives of the organization. Culture defines the boundaries of distinction between organizations, creates a sense of identity for

organization members and provides appropriate standards for what employees should say and do. Robbins goes so far as to suggest that a strong culture can in fact act as a substitute for formalization.²⁷ He says that a strong, internalized culture can replace formal rules and regulations, standard procedures and such.

Our point is that a strong culture achieves the same end without the need for written documentation. Therefore, we should view formalization and culture as two different roads to a common destination. The stronger an organization's culture, the less management need be concerned with developing formal rules and regulations to guide employee behavior. Those guides will have been internalized in employees when they accept the organization's culture.²⁸

Cultures are perpetuated within an organization through myths, stories and rituals.

Stories and Myths

Organizational culture manifests itself in a variety of ways. One of the most important is myths, stories and legends that glorify the organization and its members and exaggerate their virtues. The myths are usually replete with heroes, villains, and occasionally even heroines. Although organizations such as the marines, the F.B.I., and the police come most readily to mind as organizations that have elaborate myths that they systematically perpetuate, all organizations with an identifiable history glorify their past.²⁹

The fire service has a long and colourful history. On a broad scale, fire service personnel can refer to large disastrous fires throughout history such as the Great Fire of London in 1666, the 1835 New York City Fire, or the Great Chicago Fire, rumoured to have been started by Mrs. O'Leary's cow. The Great Chicago fire burned for 27 hours, killed 300 people, destroyed 17,500 buildings and left approximately 100,000 homeless.³⁰

Local fire departments have a repository of colourful characters and sensational exploits mixed throughout their history. Firefighters are portrayed daily in the media, and in popular movies and television series, engaged in heroic activities of one kind or another. Emergency situations provide the "stuff" of stories and myths. They are replete with potentially disastrous situations, victims and heroes prepared to take great risks to help someone else. Stories are extracted from these situations and repeated to reinforce fire department values such as dedication, heroism, quick action and service to the community.

Stories are also used to reaffirm the need to adhere to standards and to reinforce the culture of the fire service. Fire departments usually have a large repertoire of stories about personal relationships and about individuals within the organization. The story lines tend to reinforce the department's culture. "My hunch is that traditions are not passed on in formal documents as much as they are communicated by story, riddle, nickname, and anecdote. Tradition stories create a usable past so that a usable future can be built." 31

Rituals

Organizations use rituals and rites of passage to increase belongingness and pride of membership. 32 Rituals reaffirm organizational values and beliefs. Acceptance into the group indicates to new members that their socialization process into the group has been completed. Promotions provide recognition to individuals for their commitment to the organization's values and beliefs and serve to increase the commitment of other members to the organization.

Military formalities are obvious examples of organizational rituals. Paramilitary organizations such as police and fire departments are much

looser in their adoption of these types of formalities. However, a certain degree of formality is evident in the deference given to rank and position and adherence to the chain of command. Although not frequently employed, the fire service has protocols to be used in such proceedings as change of command ceremonies and fire department funerals.

Less formal and more subtle rituals are also used in the fire service to instill fire department culture. Recruits may successfully pass through their training periods, begin to "ride the trucks" and complete their probationary period. However, to be accepted into a group, new members often have to "prove" themselves on the fire ground. Experienced fire crews will scrutinize a new recruits' behaviour to assure its members that "the kid knows his or her stuff", and that the newest members can be "counted on when the going gets rough".

Trust is an important element to fire crews. The more alike individual members of a group are, the stronger the level of trust. Increased cultural diversity in the fire service will strain interpersonal relationships within fire crews. Fire service leaders will require a thorough understanding of organizational culture in order to ensure that "in-station" tensions do not create disruptive behaviour at emergency scenes.

Hazing of new members has long been an informal initiation ritual in organizations. Fire department personnel have frequently used hazing in the past to test a new recruit's desire to gain entry into the organization. Hazing in fire halls has traditionally involved the routine assignment of the least desirable fire hall maintenance duties to new rookies, or teasing and pulling tricks on the recruit. Traditionally, new recruits, selected from a work force pool that reflected the common values and beliefs of the organization's culture, anticipated and understood that they had to "earn their stripes".

Employment equity initiatives are bringing new members into the fire service that do not have a background that provides this common understanding of the type and intent of informal initiation rites such as hazing. Fire department managers will have to ensure that negative initiation practices are not condoned by management.

The hazing or initiation practices common to many fire departments and similar organizations must be curtailed. They do not contribute to a receptive work environment and may very well result in designated group members choosing to leave the department. The elimination of these practices must be closely monitored to ensure that they are not simply disguised or made more subtle. Hazing and initiation practices may constitute workplace harassment. ³³

The challenge for fire service leaders will be to create entry and acceptance mechanisms into the department that encourage commitment to the organization, but do not create barriers to designated groups. This will not be easy in an organizational culture entrenched in traditional rites of passage.

Socialization

Socialization is the process by which an organization transmits its culture, instilling in new members the values and norms of the organization, transforming an outsider into an insider. Socialization is a continuous process that begins before the individual enters the organization and ceases only when the individual leaves. ³⁴

Socialization is the process by which new members learn how to behave in order to become part of the organization. It is a continuous process by which the organization's norms, values, and beliefs are internalized and then regularly reinforced in the individual members throughout their time with the organization. It is possible that the forces involved in the

socialization process may provide opportunities to implement changes in the organization's culture and thus has some importance to managers wishing to effect change.

Although the socialization process may include formal methods such as employee orientation and training programs, for the greater part it involves learning the less obvious aspects of the organization's culture.

But the more subtle values of the organization, which may not even be well understood by the senior people, are often communicated through helpful peers communicating how the boss wants things done, how higher management feels about things, the kinds of things that are considered heroic in the organization, the kinds of things that are taboo. ³⁵

Socialization, essentially then, is the process by which a new member learns what is expected of him or her in order to become a member of the group. From the organization's perspective, socialization is an indoctrination process. For the individual, it reflects the price of membership. Robbins conceptualizes the socialization process occurring in three stages: prearrival, encounter and metamorphosis. ³⁶

The prearrival stage includes all the learning that occurs before a new member joins the group. This would include the values, norms and assumptions about life in general that a person internalizes throughout their formative years. Attitudes towards particular groups, towards work, authority and organizations already exist prior to a person being hired. This prearrival stage also includes the concept of "anticipatory socialization" which is based on the person's image and expectations of the organization they wish to join.

'Anticipatory socialization' begins even before one definitely selects a career or occupation. When children express a desire to be firefighters or doctors or police officers they have already begun to

identify with the image of those occupations. When the choice of occupation becomes more definite, anticipatory socialization intensifies. Through interaction with friends, relatives and teachers and contact with and observation of those already in the occupation, behavioral expectations and values are communicated, clarified and internalized.

... many organizations, public and private - police departments, fire departments, the Forest Service, universities, welfare agencies - have clearly developed public images that are used to recruit those already committed to the organization's goals and values. ³⁷

A clearly defined image ensures that the organization's culture, or at least the culture it wishes to portray, is understood by those outside of the organization so that recruitment drives will attract those already committed to the same values and norms. However, if the organization has only limited role models for perspective new employees to see, it may be difficult to attract employees who do not see themselves fitting into the group as they perceive it to be. This has obvious ramifications for employment equity initiatives in the fire service.

The second stage of socialization is the entry or encounter stage. This is marked by the individual's entry into the organization and his or her encounter with the realities of the job as distinct from the anticipated experience of the new job. If the recruit's expectations are in line with the reality of the job, then the socialization process is fairly smooth. However, if a significant difference exists between anticipations and reality, then it may be necessary to abandon some old values and beliefs and adapt to the new realities of the organization.

It is in the third stage, metamorphosis, that the long lasting changes are made and the individual learns, accepts and internalizes the organization's culture. The new member has been accepted into the group. The strong desire to maintain this acceptance is a powerful force

ensuring conformity to the organization's values and goals on a continuous basis.

Successful socialization provides the individual with a new self-image, new involvements, new values and accomplishments, and the knowledge, ability and motivation to play an organizationally defined role. It creates a bond between the individual and the organization and among the members of that organization. Ideally, it results in the creation of organizational commitment and loyalty. ³⁸

Socialization is a powerful process within an organization. Much of the process involves interactions between the new recruit and the immediate work group. The potential for sub-cultures within the fire service has significant implications that must be recognized by fire department managers. Conflict can arise when the smaller sub-group's values and goals are not consistent with the larger organization's values and goals. Fire departments usually provide a period of formal training before a recruit is assigned to a shift. The length of the training period may vary from department to department but in a relatively short time the recruit moves "onto the floor". This first shift assignment begins the new member's socialization into the more subtle aspects of the organization's culture.

This way of defining culture makes it specific to a given group. If a total corporation consists of stable functional, divisional, geographic, or rank-based subgroups, then that corporation will have multiple cultures within it. It is perfectly possible for those multiple cultures to be in conflict with each other, such that one could not speak of a single corporate culture. On the other hand, if there has been common corporate experience as well, then one could have a strong corporate culture on top of various subcultures that are based in subunits. The deciphering of a given company's culture then becomes an empirical matter of locating where the stable social units are, what cultures each of those stable units have developed, and how those separate cultures

blend into a single whole. The total culture could then be very homogeneous or heterogeneous, according to the degree to which subgroup cultures are similar or different.

It has also been pointed out that some of the cultural assumptions in an organization can come from the occupational background of the members of the organization. This makes it possible to have a managerial culture, an engineering culture, a science culture, a labor-union culture, etc., all of which coexist in a given organization. ³⁹

A high number of sub-cultures within an organization becomes a complicating factor when attempts are made to implement change, particularly if the change has cultural implications. As sub-cultures diverge from the dominant culture of the organization, the organization itself may begin to suffer from disunity and a weakened stability. Peer pressure from the immediate workforce begins to exert undue influence.

Given the wide geographic dispersal of fire companies, particularly in large urban areas, 'rules take the place of personal surveillance.' However, many fire units view directives as petty interferences in their preferred routine. Such social characteristics as values, commitment, traditions, and shared beliefs with immediate co-workers do more to control behavior than the bureaucracy. ⁴⁰

As mentioned earlier in the paper, crews working out of individual firehalls tend to work as closely knit teams. Therefore, it should be anticipated that each crew will have its own sub-culture reflecting the dominant fire department culture to a greater or lesser degree. These sub-cultures can be so powerful that the influence of the group is not only felt horizontally as peer pressure, but may also be felt up through the officer ranks. This upward influence has been referred to as "clan control".

Clan control is an upward influence, from fire fighter to lieutenant, lieutenant to captain, etc. As a

positive force, it helps encourage reluctant individuals to perform better; negatively, it works to undermine legitimate authority. Did you ever wonder why a fire company officer didn't enforce rules such as wearing the proper uniform? Or being seated while the vehicle is moving? If he doesn't know department policy, he is incompetent. If he knows it's wrong and dangerous, but is unwilling to risk negative feedback from subordinates, that's clan control. ⁴¹

If culture is such a powerful force within an organization one is led to ask whether or not it is possible to truly effect cultural change. One certainly is that effecting change at the cultural level of an organization must be part of a long range plan. Culture is embedded in an organization's history, traditions and experience, and has been developed and internalized over a long period of time. Effecting change in an organization's culture will subsequently be a long process.

So, if a given culture, over time becomes inappropriate to an organization and a handicap to management, there may be little management can do to change it. This is especially true in the short run. Under the most favourable conditions, cultural changes have to be measured in years, not weeks or months. ⁴²

The socialization process encompasses the formal aspects normally performed within the organization's formal programs, and informal aspects which are performed on a local level by the individual work group. Difficulties arise for the individual caught in between when the norms and values of a sub-group are in conflict with the overall organization norms. This is a distinct possibility in the fire service where new recruits become members of sub-groups after a limited opportunity for the larger organization to socialize the person into its values and norms. In other words, no matter how much effort may be spent during the formal indoctrination and training stages, the members of the first crew that the "rookie" is assigned to will have a tremendous influence on his or her future attitudes and behaviour towards the organization.

Van Maanen suggests that the ideal is when an individual conforms to values of both the immediate work group and the larger organization. This requires consistency between the two cultures. When the cultures of the organization and its sub-groups diverge, the individual involved must choose and will respond in one of three manners.

When those norms diverge, the individual must make a choice. The isolate opts for the organization's norms and pays the price of being ostracized by the group. The ratebuster, the dedicated upwardly mobile person (frequently referred to in quite different terms by colleagues), resists group pressure in favour of the rewards and benefits of organizational approval. The warrior chooses the opposite route of work group approval and acceptance, overtly or covertly battling "the system", criticizing or ignoring the rules and policies, violating the norms, and challenging the authority system. Warriors are frequently regarded as heroes by their work group and are supported and protected by it. Outsiders conform to neither the group's nor the organization's norms, and the anxiety associated with that role is so severe that few individuals maintain it for very long. They either leave the organization or convert to one of the other roles. ⁴²

Unfortunately, the fire service seems to have its fair share of warriors. Often the exploits of these warriors are raised to the status of myths. This may, in part, be a result of the paramilitary, authoritarian structure and the opportunity it provides for those who need to challenge the system. The same individuals who fight the status quo of the system, ironically are often the same people who resist change. Understanding change resisters and the influence they can exert on a group is critical for change agents.

Organizations have a culture. The leaders of the organization can establish, reaffirm and sometimes even change an organization's culture. Gaining a clear understanding of an organization's culture is often

complicated by the existence of sub-groups within the organization who develop their own sub-cultures which may or may not reflect the organizational culture. In the fire service the existence of sub-groups increases the complexity of the organization's culture. When attempting to effect change, the organization's leaders must have a clear understanding of how the organization's culture and structure can assist or impede attempts to introduce change.

Change intervention is a particularly difficult task in organizations with a clear sense of purpose. A strong sense of purpose coupled with an historical structure and culture that has traditionally enabled the organization to effectively serve its purpose will resist change.

In a fire department, the organizational culture generally values strong leadership, use of established work methods, and a community service orientation. The chief and other managers can influence the organizational culture in a number of ways. ⁴³

Leaders of any organization must be able to recognize the need to make a change and then choose a method of introducing the change. Differentiating between structure and culture within an organization is important when choosing a change intervention method. Attempting to implement a particular change issue through either the structure or the culture of an organization in isolation from each other reflects a lack of understanding of the change process.

Organizational culture has long been ignored or underestimated as a determinant of organizational behavior and performance. Faults or problems that have previously been attributed to structure, such as bureaucratic inertia or bureaucratic arrogance, may well be more of a result of the culture of a specific bureaucratic agency than of bureaucracy in general. ⁴⁴

Barriers to Change

Change is resisted. Organizations, like people, tend to maintain the

organization's stability by doing things in the same way all the time. The fire service throughout history has generally been receptive to changes in technology or techniques that have obvious benefits in meeting its goals. These changes have been evolutionary rather than revolutionary. Past changes, for the most part, were incremental and could be easily handled. Fire department leaders and personnel put up little resistance to a new piece of equipment or technique that will make their job easier or more effective.

However, fire departments, like most organizations, experience difficulty when the change forces become too rapid or too radical and envision a revolutionary new way of doing things. Individuals who work in the department begin to feel threatened. Even the organization itself may feel threatened and raise barriers to change. Firefighters' unions may present impediments to the change process if they perceive a threat to their membership.

Organizational resistance to change really has two components that must be considered. How will the proposed change affect the individuals within the department and how will the change affect the overall departmental structure and culture. Resistance will come from the individual's or sub-groups within the organizations. Change agents will need to identify the potential sources of resistance and develop a plan to address these areas.

Structurally, fire departments are mechanistic and have a top-down, bureaucratic administrative system. There is some evidence to suggest that this organizational model is more capable of radical change than are more organic models. ⁴⁵ Centralized power and decision making in machine bureaucracies, including fire departments, provides a mechanism for

implementing radical change. But even organizational leaders, like fire chiefs, who operate in an organizational structure conducive to implementing top-down change, must still consider other models for change in order to have a range of options to use and a broad understanding of all of the dynamics of change in order to deal with resistance.

Can Change Be Effectively Managed?

After considering the impact of organizational structure, cultural complexity and the barriers to change one would have to question whether or not it is even possible to successfully manage change in the fire service. Yet fire departments have been around for a long time as relatively stable organizations that have withstood tremendous changes in society and the services they provide. Fire service leaders who will be successful in maintaining this stability in their organizations and survive eras of rapid change, will have a good understanding of the strengths of their departments and of the methods of implementing and managing desirable changes while keeping organizational stress to a minimum.

An organization that is in the process of change is always in a transitional state. It is always moving on a continuum that reflects incremental change. A fire department is always moving from the state of stability created by its past toward a new way of doing things - the future. This process often creates stress and conflict. For example, one can observe a great deal of difficulty in an organization that is moving from a totally volunteer force to a combination or totally paid force. Another more subtle example might be the adoption of a company fire inspection program in a department that has no fire prevention program. The new role of "fire inspector" may be difficult for a firefighter to fulfill. A change in roles can create anxiety. ⁴⁶

In order to introduce change with the least amount of stress and disruption possible, managers should be aware of the theoretical models of change that they can draw upon. An understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of each model will enable fire service leaders to identify appropriate approaches to planning and implementing change. We will look at three models of change. In all likelihood, successful change managers will draw on aspects from each model as they discover what works and what doesn't work within their organization when dealing with particular types of issues.

We will look at three models - the top-down approach, the organizational development approach and a stakeholder participation model. ⁴⁷

Top-down Change Model

The top-down change model views the organization as a pyramid with management at the top of a mechanistic bureaucracy. A top-down approach assumes that all members share the goals and values of the organization, people will act in a rational, predictable manner and that management will always act in the best interests of the organization. ⁴⁸ The top-down model represents the traditional, bureaucratic approach in organizational theory.

The top-down model can be effective in certain change initiatives. Situations in which a top-down approach to change would be appropriate are when the change must be made within a short time frame, when the change is being forced by powers outside of the organization, where the need for change is widely recognized and supported within the organization and where the changes will primarily affect the structure or administration of the organization.

The top-down approach has an inherent weakness if widespread understanding and support for the change do not exist.

The top executive's decision to embark is a necessary but not sufficient condition for arrival at the destination of an organizational change journey. The engine of the change will stall outside of the executive suite if the people who must carry out all the complex operations required to make the program run cannot be induced to climb aboard, or if they resist or even sabotage the process. ⁴⁹

Participating Equalization Strategies

The second model for change management attempts to gain worker support for the proposed change by encouraging employee participation in the change process. This process has its roots in organizational development (OD) theories and practice. Heffron refers to this process as a "power equalization strategy". ⁵⁰

Participatory change processes are most appropriate where time pressures are not critical, when the need for change is not widely understood within the organization, where participation is expected and the desired change is going to have considerable impact on the cultural components of the organization. Proponents of OD as a change process assume that change occurs primarily within the organization's culture - its norms, values and attitudes. ⁵¹ OD is a systems oriented approach that stresses the importance of integrating individual and organizational values, attitudes and objectives. OD relies heavily on employee education, employee participation in choosing the direction of change, and a power shift to lower levels of the organizational structure to implement and manage change.

Proponents of the OD model for change maintain that the participative aspect of the process will enhance the level of trust throughout the organization, recognize and deal with potential confrontations, open communications, encourage personal enthusiasm and increase self and group responsibility for successful implementation of the change. 52

A current theme of discussion in public administration is the revival of interest in the underlying democratic values of our society and, in particular, the role and degree of participation at the local government level and in the administration of public agencies.

Critics of current government administration have complained that government has become too preoccupied with solving tactical problems at the expense of public participation.

This shift toward technical rationality as a basis for public administration causes significant problems in hierarchical organizations, including the fire service. The end result is that citizen input based on social values is replaced by bureaucratic decisions based on technical goals. 53

Participatory management styles and change processes attempt to address this tendency of focusing on the end results with little concern for the organizational distress involved.

Organizational development theories have met with a great deal of resistance in some organizations and particularly in organizations where employees belong to a strong bargaining group. Organizational development initiatives, Quality of Work Life programs and other participatory management models are often viewed with distrust by union leaders.

Unionists know from experience that tough times are coming when people whose economic interests differ from ours start talking about "partnership and co-operation" ...

That's why when labour is asked to enter a partnership with employees, labour becomes the only "partner" required to deny its interests and sacrifice its goals. Not surprisingly, labour rejects that concept of co-operation as naive and self-defeating. It fights back instead. And there is plenty to fight about: working people are now undergoing an attack on their interests which is unprecedented in recent Canadian history. 54

Most full-time fire departments in North America are unionized and maintain strong affiliations with the provincial, federal and international unions. The membership of the union members mirrors that of the fire department and therefore, reflects similar cultural values, norms and attitudes. Fire service leaders must recognize the role of unions in the change process. The union itself should be viewed as a sub-culture within the larger organization. Fire department personnel frequently split their allegiances between the fire department as an organization and the union body. A conscious effort to involve the union in the change process is essential in order to overcome this potentially insurmountable barrier to change. The condition of the labour / management relationship will determine the degree of resistance that may be encountered as leaders try to introduce participative change processes in the department.

The third model rests on a complex image of the organization in an open system, involved in continual transactions with other organizations and influenced by technological developments, market conditions, government policy and numerous other factors in its changing environment. The organization itself consists of people interacting within a structure of authority, rules, and informal codes of behaviour that they collectively create and modify. People as individuals and as members of groups have distinct

perspectives and interests that are linked to their positions in the hierarchy and to their unique responsibilities, identities as members of professions or trades, and various other sources of meaning in their working lives. Some groups with which employees affiliate, such as unions, professional associations and advocacy groups, extend beyond the organization's boundaries.⁵⁵

The stakeholder participation model has some obvious value for an organization that must deal with a diversity of key stakeholder groups. This is particularly true where the culture of the organization has the potential for strong resistance to change.

Employment equity, as a change issue, provides an example where the stakeholder participation model can provide an appropriate mechanism for successful implementation of change in the fire service. Police services have a slightly longer history of dealing with employment equity than the fire service. Many of the cultural and structural aspects of police and fire departments are similar and so it is possible to refer to the police experience as an example for the fire service.

In implementing their employment equity strategies, change agents in the larger police organizations may find that, while it is critical to have commitment at the top, it is not effective to introduce change from the top only, and to depend exclusively on formal authority structures and rules to establish new patterns. Nor can external stakeholder groups be excluded from the change process. One might expect that those responsible for implementing the employment equity provisions of Ontario's Police Services Act will find it necessary to move toward a participatory approach to change in order to attain the results required.⁵⁶

In changing the structure and culture of the organization, groups within the police service need to be involved - for example police associations, as well as superintendents, inspectors, sergeants, and persons

in other uniform and civilian positions who will be interacting as peers or subordinates with newly recruited women and minorities. It will be critical to involve these stakeholders on issues affecting their vital interests, as when revered and widely accepted values need to be scrutinized and perhaps redefined and then institutionalized in a new form. For example, the traditional mode of promotion from within appears to be challenged under the employment equity regulations in Ontario's Police Services Act by the need to develop positive measures such as lateral entry, as well as direct entry, to administrative positions by members of designated groups.

Cultural change involving stakeholder participation will also need to occur in order to create a climate in which diversity, and a broader concept of the professional image of the officer, are accepted. A woman cannot perform effectively in policing if she is a victim of sexual harassment, or if peers exclude her from collegial social interaction or if superior officers are paternalistic and do not assign her to certain functions or provide informative performance evaluations.⁵⁷

The stakeholder participation model also recognizes the politics of power that exist in organizations. "Contemporary analyses of how power works in organizations emphasize that power is relational, rather an attribute of individuals. You can only influence another person if they acquiesce."⁵⁸ The use of power from an authority position in an attempt to influence change without gaining the support of individuals within the organization is based on coercion. Coercion is not a useful strategy in the long run. It fails to gain support from members of the organization for the long term maintenance of the desired change or for future change initiatives. People tend to support projects and programs in which they have some say. Top-down directives in which there has been no opportunity for input frequently give rise to resistance. A fire service leader who relies continually on a top-down, authoritarian approach will have difficulty implementing change in the long run and may even create an organizational culture resistant to change.

Critical Elements in Change Management

The last part of this paper will assess the use of strategic planning as a model for change management in the fire service. However, prior to that it would be useful to summarize the critical elements involved in the change process.

The first critical element is "sponsorship" of change initiatives. A sponsor is the person or persons in an organization who recognize and support the need for change and, secondly, control the resources needed to effect the change. The change sponsor must either be at a controlling level in the organization or gain the support of top level management. The sponsor must show commitment on a personal level and ensure a commitment from other key people or groups within the organization.

The second critical element in change management is the need to "target resistance". Job security, loss of promotional opportunities and control and the general uncertainty that comes with any organizational change are all issues that can give rise to resistance in the organization either from individuals or from groups. Individuals when confronted with change fear a loss of identity and belonging, loss of control, loss of meaning and the loss of the future as they expected it would be.⁵⁹ The easier the transition process is made moving from the way things were to the way things will be, then the less resistance will be met. Transition is the inner reorientation individuals and groups go through when change requires them to stop doing things one way and start doing them another. Proper change management will make the transition process smoother.

Cultural consistency is a third element in the change process. An organization's "readiness" for change determines the amount of energy and time that will be required to implement a given change. Values, beliefs,

assumptions and the attitudes of key stakeholders within, and outside of the organization will play vital roles in not only a particular change issue but also the degree to which an organization is ready for change. An organization that has experienced limited change will require more energy to effect change than one that is "used" to things changing on a regular basis.

Once of the crucial factors in determining response to change appears to be how much change an individual is accustomed to experiencing ... From this perspective, the more things change, the more individuals are likely to accept the change; what causes the most resistance is acceleration in the rate of change. ⁶⁰

The existence of sub-groups within an organization and their support for the proposed change will be an important factor in the success of the change initiative. Stakeholder participation processes will assist in addressing the different concerns of individuals and groups.

The fourth critical element is the "change agent's skill". A change agent within an organization is a person or team that plans, implements and manages change issues and processes. Their level of understanding of the dynamics of change and their skills at applying the various models for managing change will determine the level of success and ease of implementing organizational change.

Strategic Planning as A Change Process

A discussion on strategic planning is included in this paper not to provide an in-depth analysis of the appropriateness of strategic planning in the public sector but, rather, to suggest that there are components of the strategic planning process that can assist in the implementation and management of change in the fire service. Strategic planning provides a

system that allows for participation by management and key stakeholders in identifying change issues, in assessing the organization's ability to deal with change, in developing appropriate responses and mechanisms to deal with change and to unite the organization as it encounters a changing environment.

Strategic planning is a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization (or other entity) is, what it does and why it does it. ⁶¹

Strategic planning can be defined, very simply, as a method for maximizing the position of an organization in a changing and competitive environment. ⁶²

Strategic planning has received both enthusiastic support and severe criticism regarding its appropriateness as a planning tool in the public sector. Critics have raised the issue of whether a planning process developed in the private sector can be transferred and used effectively in the public sector. Criticism has generally resulted from those who have developed a narrower view of strategic planning. They view it as a top-down system that requires firm control and coercive pressures from upper management to successfully accomplish a change in direction in an organization. Critics argue that C.E.O.'s in the private sector have the authority and resources to implement sudden and dramatic change in the organization in response to changing markets, economic conditions, etc. while public officials are directed by political and public pressure and mandates. ⁶³

Proponents of strategic planning would argue that its ability to adapt to a changing environment, such as found in the public sector, is a characteristic that makes strategic planning an appropriate planning process for decision making in governments. The traditional role of government at the municipal level is the provision of basic services.

Its accessibility to stakeholder input has always been recognized as an important element in a democratic society. While profit bottom-line is the primary motivator in private business, the mission of local government is service to the public. Proponents of strategic planning and management would say it allows for the flexibility necessary in public enterprises while providing direction and future planning to the organization.

Strategic management in the municipal sector must consciously promote flexibility to allow managers and elected officials to respond to changing circumstances and challenges. In this way, the chief strength of local government (its responsiveness) can be maintained while, at the same time, its chief weakness (short-term ad hoc decisions) can be offset by effective planning. ⁶⁴

Bryson outlines an eight-step strategic planning process. ⁶⁵ The steps are:

1. Initiating and agreeing on a strategic planning process.
2. Identifying organizational mandates.
3. Clarifying organizational mission and values.
4. Assessing the external environment: opportunities and threats.
5. Assessing the internal environment: strengths and weaknesses.
6. Identifying the strategic issues facing an organization.
7. Formulating strategies to manage the issues.
8. Establishing an effective organizational vision for the future.

It would seem that this process accomplishes many of the requirements we have discussed regarding organizational change and in particular, change in the fire service. Proponents of strategic planning argue that one of its key strengths is the degree of consultation with key stakeholders inside and outside of the organization.

The first three steps - initiating and agreeing on the process, identifying organizational mandates and clarifying mission and values provides a means to focus the organization's members in a particular direction and establishes priorities.

Steps four to eight provide the opportunity for stakeholder participation that we have recognized as critical in the change process. Of particular interest is the step wherein the organization's members conduct an analysis of its internal strengths and weaknesses and assesses these in light of existing or anticipated opportunities and threats in its external environment (SWOT).

Proponents of strategic planning argue that such an internal analysis is crucial to the management of change because it ensures consultation with internal stakeholders and, secondly, serves as a communication tool throughout the levels within the organization.

The critical difference between strategic planning and the familiar rational/comprehensive model lies in the power of the environmental scan which offers critical contextual information for user organizations. Whereas traditional planning techniques are often inward-looking, strategic planning focuses on an organization's external, as well as internal, operating environments. ⁶⁶

Organizational structure in the fire service is based on a mechanical bureaucracy. This structure has functioned well in the past and can continue to function well in the future, providing that the leaders of fire departments recognize the need to accommodate the changing environment in which they operate. The culture of the fire service is action-oriented, strong on tradition and values strong leadership. Its members seek organizational stability in structure and culture.

It is unrealistic and unnecessary to change the systems that have been used in the management of fire departments in any dramatic or fundamental ways. Rather, given the natural bent of fire chiefs and fire fighters to work in an organized, structured environment, it is appropriate to develop a system that maintains the key elements of the organization's structure while at the same time, creating a working climate and culture that ensures the department meets the needs of its internal and external stakeholders.

I've come to the realization that organizations are not full democracies, we can't all get into the market square and stamp our spears. So purpose, values, traditions, and strategies are owned by the senior level. This is a leadership function. That doesn't mean that everybody can't have some input. ⁶⁷

The strategic planning process, adopted as an ongoing management system, provides a means of managing change in a way that will encourage support from as many of the people and groups involved as possible within an organization setting.

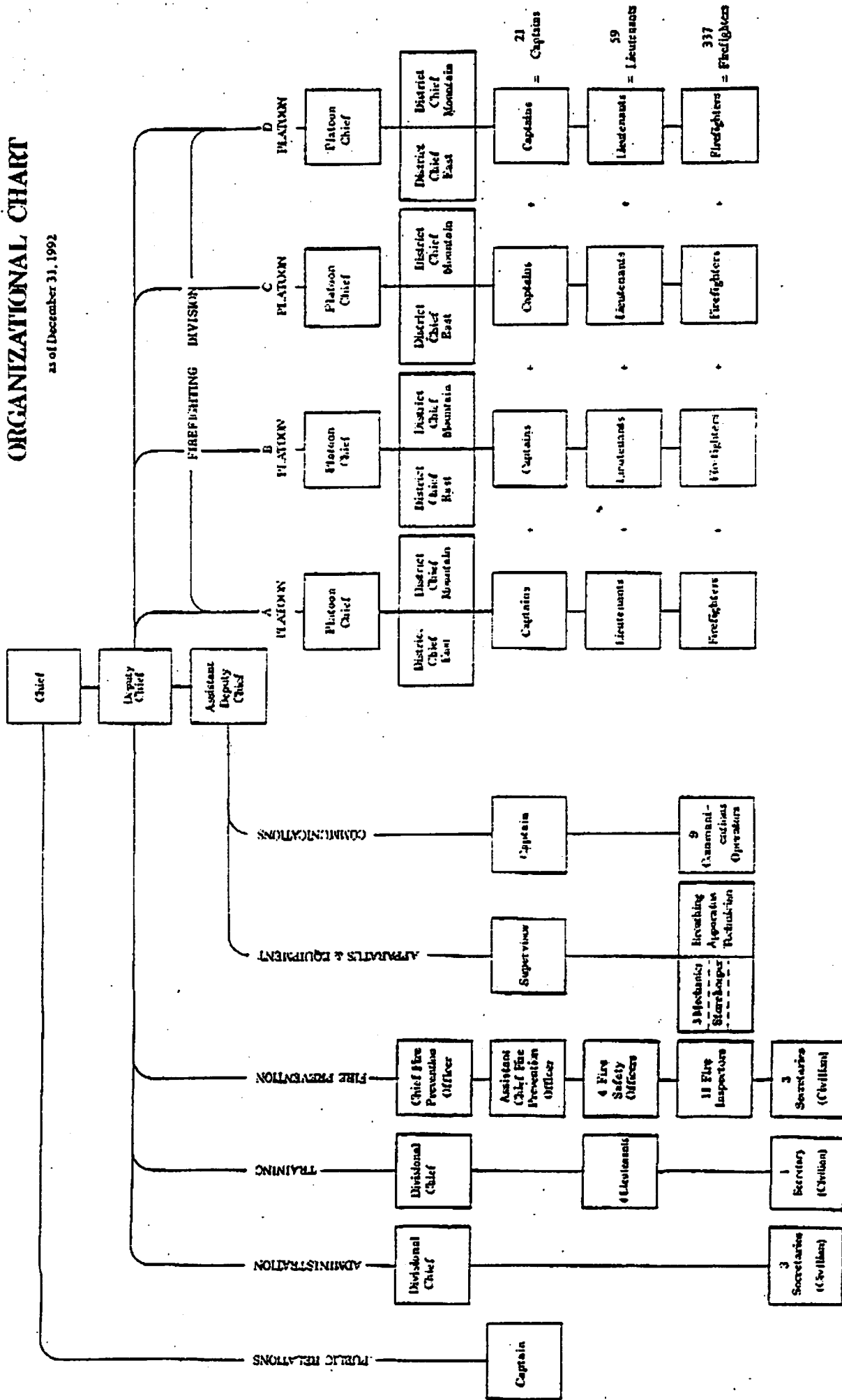
It provides a top-down management approach which appears appropriate in the fire service while providing opportunities for employee participation in the process.

The challenge facing fire service leaders will be to ensure that the organizational stability essential to the effective provision of fire protection in a community continues in a manner that can accommodate change. An awareness of the individual and organizational responses to change and an understanding of basic change models and strategies discussed in this paper will assist fire chiefs to effectively manage their "changing departments" in a "changing world".

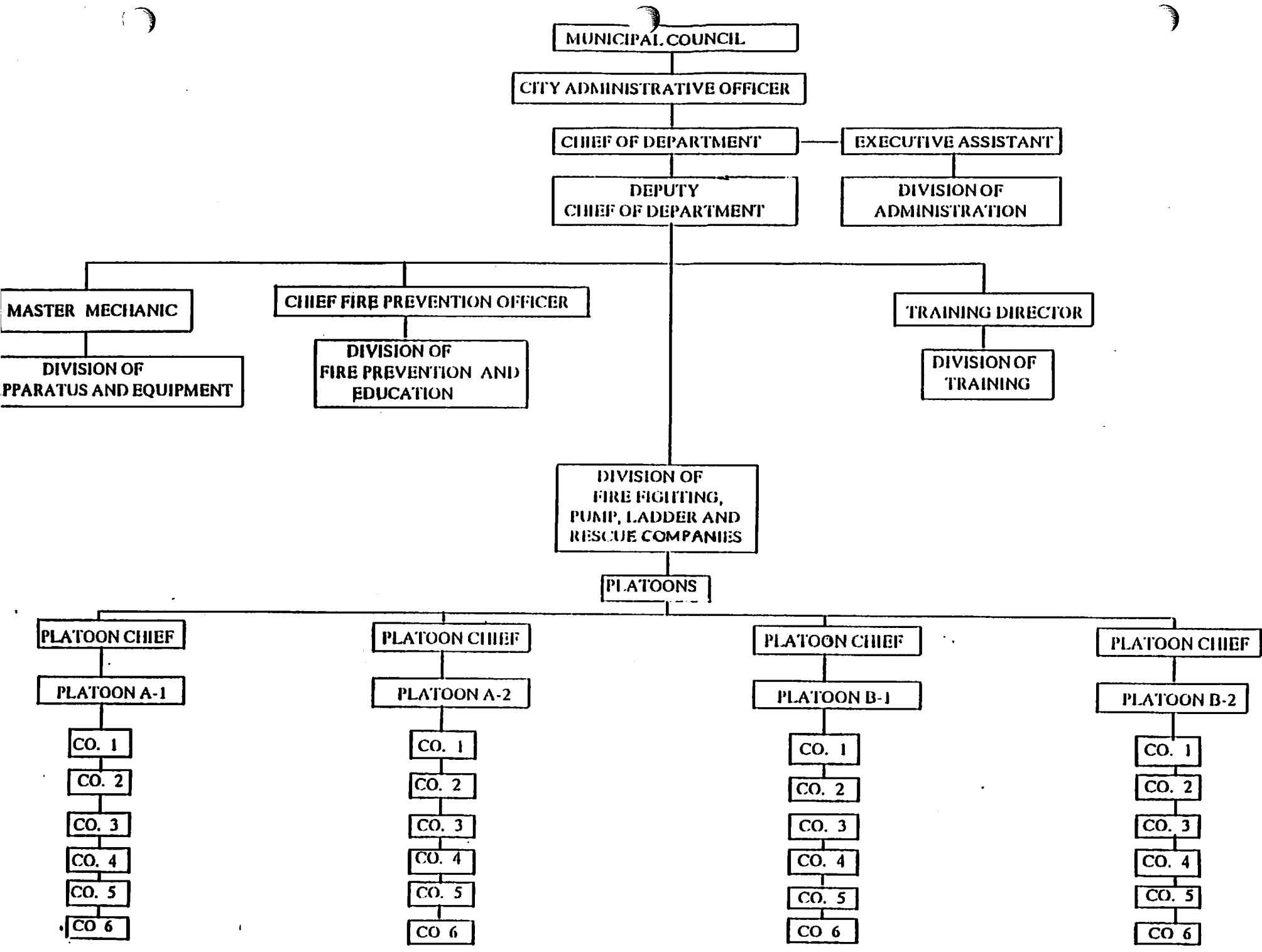


HAMILTON FIRE DEPARTMENT ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

as of December 31, 1992

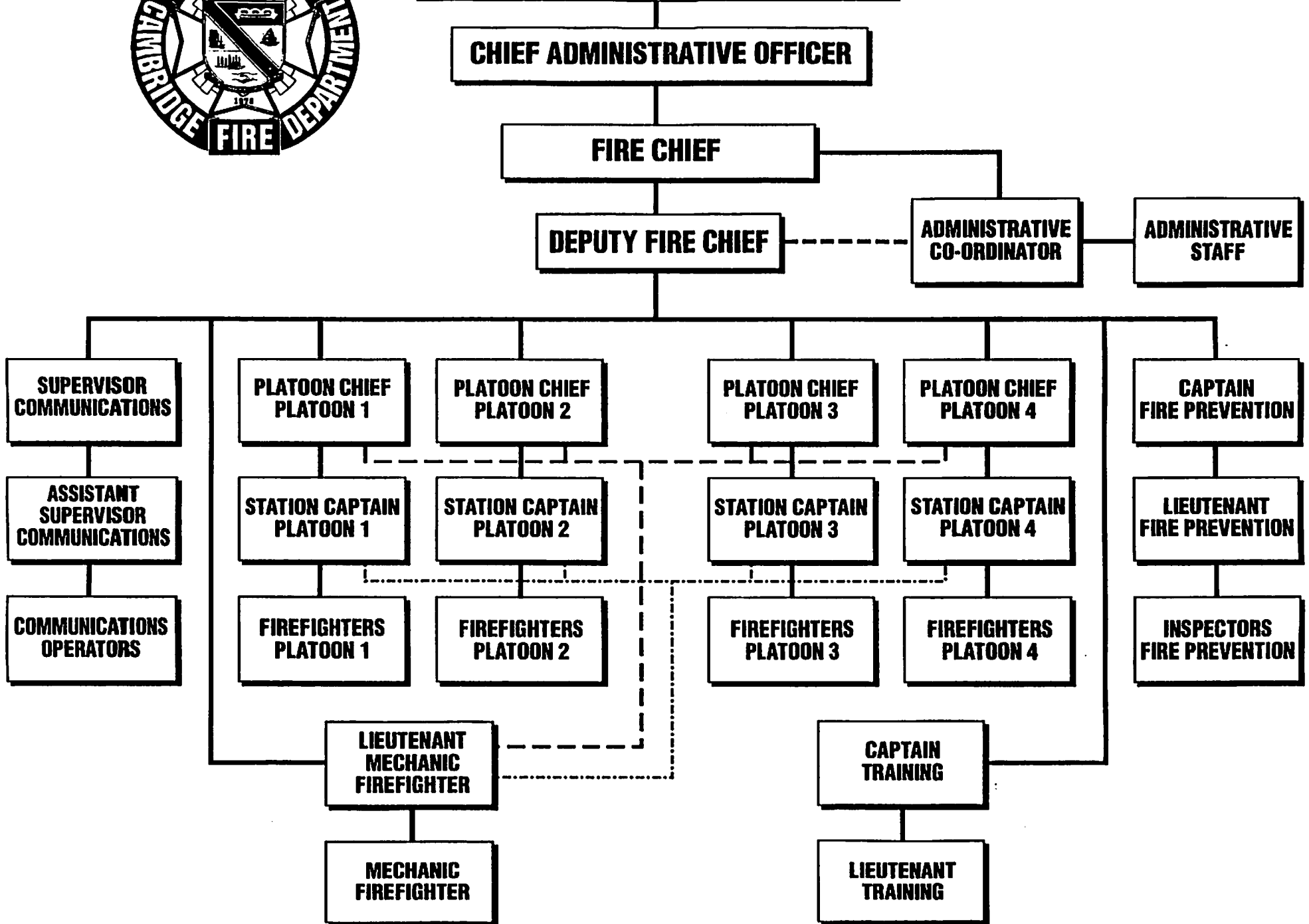


ORGANIZATION CHART - KITTIC TENDER FIRE DEPARTMENT





Cambridge City Council



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