

Leadership I for Fire and EMS: Strategies for Company Success

LS I-Student Manual

3rd Edition, 5th Printing-November 2013



FEMA

FEMA/USFA/NFA

LS I-SM

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

UNITED STATES FIRE ADMINISTRATION

NATIONAL FIRE ACADEMY

FOREWORD

The U.S. Fire Administration (USFA), an important component of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), serves the leadership of this Nation as the DHS's fire protection and emergency response expert. The USFA is located at the National Emergency Training Center (NETC) in Emmitsburg, Maryland, and includes the National Fire Academy (NFA), National Fire Data Center (NFDC), and the National Fire Programs (NFP). The USFA also provides oversight and management of the Noble Training Center in Anniston, Alabama. The mission of the USFA is to save lives and reduce economic losses due to fire and related emergencies through training, research, data collection and analysis, public education, and coordination with other Federal agencies and fire protection and emergency service personnel.

The USFA's National Fire Academy offers a diverse course delivery system, combining resident courses, off-campus deliveries in cooperation with State training organizations, weekend instruction, and online courses. The USFA maintains a blended learning approach to its course selections and course development. Resident courses are delivered at both the Emmitsburg campus and the Noble facility. Off-campus courses are delivered in cooperation with State and local fire training organizations to ensure this Nation's firefighters are prepared for the hazards they face.

Designed to meet the needs of the Fire/EMS Officer, this course of Leadership provides the participant with basic skills and tools needed to perform effectively as a leader in the fire service environment. This course addresses ethics, use and abuse of power at the Fire/EMS Officer level, creativity in the fire service environment, and managing the multiple roles of the Fire/EMS Officer.

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DEVELOPMENT TEAM

Chief Charles Addington II, D.O.
Family Physician
Chief, Wolfforth Fire and EMS Department
P.O. Box 845
Wolfforth, TX 79382

John N. Carnegis MS, RN/NREMT-P
Program Specialist, ESF-4
Deputy Resource Support Section Chief NRCC
U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS)/Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)/U.S. Fire Administration (USFA)/National Fire Programs (NFP)/Emergency Response Support Branch

Dr. Burton A. Clark, EFO, CFO, EMT-B
Chair, Management Science Program
DHS/FEMA/USFA/National Fire Academy (NFA)
Emmitsburg, MD 21727

Ken Farmer, Section Chief
Leadership and Fire Risk Reduction
USFA/NFA
16825 S. Seton Avenue
Emmitsburg, MD 21727

Stacey A. Harmon
Instructional Systems Specialist
Leadership and Fire Risk Reduction Branch
DHS/FEMA/USFA/NFA

Chief Jonathan Riffle, EMT-B
Huntington Fire and Rescue
P.O. Box 353
Huntingtown, MD 20639

Chief Dennis L. Rubin, EFO, CFO, CEM, CMO, NREMT-B
6722 3rd Street, NW #104
Washington, DC 20012-2750

Michael Stern, NREMT-P
Training Specialist
Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Program and Responder Health and Safety Program
DHS/FEMA/USFA/NFA

Chief Fred C. Windisch, EFO, CFO, EMT-B
Ponderosa Fire Dept.
17061 Rolling Creek
Houston, TX 77090-2411

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COURSE SCHEDULE

MODULES

Problem-Solving: Identifying Needs and Problems

Decisionmaking Styles

Planning Skills for the Fire/Emergency Medical Services Officer

Communications for the Fire/Emergency Medical Services Officer

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FIREFIGHTER CODE OF ETHICS

Background

The Fire Service is a noble calling, one which is founded on mutual respect and trust between firefighters and the citizens they serve. To ensure the continuing integrity of the Fire Service, the highest standards of ethical conduct must be maintained at all times.

Developed in response to the publication of the Fire Service Reputation Management White Paper, the purpose of this National Firefighter Code of Ethics is to establish criteria that encourages fire service personnel to promote a culture of ethical integrity and high standards of professionalism in our field. The broad scope of this recommended Code of Ethics is intended to mitigate and negate situations that may result in embarrassment and waning of public support for what has historically been a highly respected profession.

Ethics comes from the Greek word *ethos*, meaning character. Character is not necessarily defined by how a person behaves when conditions are optimal and life is good. It is easy to take the high road when the path is paved and obstacles are few or non-existent. Character is also defined by decisions made under pressure, when no one is looking, when the road contains land mines, and the way is obscured. As members of the Fire Service, we share a responsibility to project an ethical character of professionalism, integrity, compassion, loyalty and honesty in all that we do, all of the time.

We need to accept this ethics challenge and be truly willing to maintain a culture that is consistent with the expectations outlined in this document. By doing so, we can create a legacy that validates and sustains the distinguished Fire Service institution, and at the same time ensure that we leave the Fire Service in better condition than when we arrived.



FIREFIGHTER CODE OF ETHICS

I understand that I have the responsibility to conduct myself in a manner that reflects proper ethical behavior and integrity. In so doing, I will help foster a continuing positive public perception of the fire service. Therefore, I pledge the following...

- Always conduct myself, on and off duty, in a manner that reflects positively on myself, my department and the fire service in general.
- Accept responsibility for my actions and for the consequences of my actions.
- Support the concept of fairness and the value of diverse thoughts and opinions.
- Avoid situations that would adversely affect the credibility or public perception of the fire service profession.
- Be truthful and honest at all times and report instances of cheating or other dishonest acts that compromise the integrity of the fire service.
- Conduct my personal affairs in a manner that does not improperly influence the performance of my duties, or bring discredit to my organization.
- Be respectful and conscious of each member's safety and welfare.
- Recognize that I serve in a position of public trust that requires stewardship in the honest and efficient use of publicly owned resources, including uniforms, facilities, vehicles and equipment and that these are protected from misuse and theft.
- Exercise professionalism, competence, respect and loyalty in the performance of my duties and use information, confidential or otherwise, gained by virtue of my position, only to benefit those I am entrusted to serve.
- Avoid financial investments, outside employment, outside business interests or activities that conflict with or are enhanced by my official position or have the potential to create the perception of impropriety.
- Never propose or accept personal rewards, special privileges, benefits, advancement, honors or gifts that may create a conflict of interest, or the appearance thereof.
- Never engage in activities involving alcohol or other substance use or abuse that can impair my mental state or the performance of my duties and compromise safety.
- Never discriminate on the basis of race, religion, color, creed, age, marital status, national origin, ancestry, gender, sexual preference, medical condition or handicap.
- Never harass, intimidate or threaten fellow members of the service or the public and stop or report the actions of other firefighters who engage in such behaviors.
- Responsibly use social networking, electronic communications, or other media technology opportunities in a manner that does not discredit, dishonor or embarrass my organization, the fire service and the public. I also understand that failure to resolve or report inappropriate use of this media equates to condoning this behavior.

Developed by the National Society of Executive Fire Officers

A Student Guide to End-of-course Evaluations

Say What You Mean ...

Ten Things You Can Do to Improve the National Fire Academy

The National Fire Academy takes its course evaluations very seriously. Your comments and suggestions enable us to improve your learning experience.

Unfortunately, we often get end-of-course comments like these that are vague and, therefore, not actionable. We know you are trying to keep your answers short, but the more specific you can be, the better we can respond.

Actual quotes from student evaluations:	Examples of specific, actionable comments that would help us improve the course:
1 "Update the materials."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The (ABC) fire video is out-of-date because of the dangerous tactics it demonstrates. The available (XYZ) video shows current practices. The student manual references building codes that are 12 years old.
2 "We want an advanced class in (fill in the blank)."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We would like a class that enables us to calculate energy transfer rates resulting from exposure fires. We would like a class that provides one-on-one workplace harassment counseling practice exercises.
3 "More activities."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An activity where students can physically measure the area of sprinkler coverage would improve understanding of the concept. Not all students were able to fill all ICS positions in the exercises. Add more exercises so all students can participate.
4 "A longer course."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The class should be increased by one hour per day to enable all students to participate in exercises. The class should be increased by two days so that all group presentations can be peer evaluated and have written abstracts.
5 "Readable plans."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The plans should be enlarged to 11 by 17 and provided with an accurate scale. My plan set was blurry, which caused the dotted lines to be interpreted as solid lines.
6 "Better student guide organization," "manual did not coincide with slides."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The slide sequence in Unit 4 did not align with the content in the student manual from slides 4-16 through 4-21. The instructor added slides in Unit 4 that were not in my student manual.
7 "Dry in spots."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The instructor/activity should have used student group activities rather than lecture to explain Maslow's Hierarchy. Create a pre-course reading on symbiotic personal relationships rather than trying to lecture on them in class.
8 "More visual aids."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The text description of V-patterns did not provide three-dimensional views. More photographs or drawings would help me imagine the pattern. There was a video clip on NBC News (date) that summarized the topic very well.
9 "Re-evaluate pre-course assignments."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The pre-course assignments were not discussed or referenced in class. Either connect them to the course content or delete them. The pre-course assignments on ICS could be reduced to a one-page job aid rather than a 25-page reading.
10 "A better understanding of NIMS."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The instructor did not explain the connection between NIMS and ICS. The student manual needs an illustrated guide to NIMS.

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PROBLEM-SOLVING: IDENTIFYING NEEDS AND PROBLEMS

OBJECTIVES

The students will:

1. *Identify services provided by a typical fire/emergency medical services (EMS) department (outputs), and resources needed to provide these services (inputs), and understand their interrelationship.*
 2. *Describe advantages and disadvantages of individual and group problem-solving.*
 3. *Demonstrate Nominal Group Technique (NGT).*
 4. *Describe four methods by which problems are solved.*
 5. *Outline the critical steps in a problem-solving model.*
 6. *Apply force field analysis as an aid to diagnosing a problem.*
-

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I. GENERAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE FIRE/EMS OFFICER

- A. Mission accomplishment.
- B. Linkage.
- C. Transform goals to actions.
- D. Resource allocation.
- E. Problem-solving.

II. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SERVICE DELIVERY AND NEEDED RESOURCES

- A. Services.
- B. Resources needed for delivery of services.

- C. Relationship between services and resources.

- D. Processes within the department.

- E. The community provides inputs (resources) and the fire/emergency medical services (EMS) department provides processes in order to achieve outputs (services).

III. PROBLEM-SOLVING: A CRITICAL SKILL

- A. Fire/EMS Officer challenges.
 - 1. Fire/EMS Officer is responsible for efficient service delivery.
 - 2. Fire/EMS Officer must allocate available resources.
 - 3. Fire/EMS Officer must be sensitive to company needs.
 - 4. Fire/EMS Officer must prioritize and balance individual and group needs.
 - 5. Fire/EMS Officer must determine whether existing processes are meeting existing needs.
 - 6. If not, there's a problem and the Fire/EMS Officer must establish problem-solving priorities.

- B. Is identifying and solving problems a company or management responsibility?

IV. IDENTIFYING AND PRIORITIZING PROBLEMS

- A. What is a problem?
- B. Multiple problems.
- C. Level of participation in problem identification.
- D. Use a group process for problem identification and prioritization.
- E. Techniques for increasing effectiveness of groups.
 - 1. Brainstorming.
 - 2. Nominal Group Technique (NGT).

V. BRAINSTORMING

Rules.

- A. Record all ideas.
- B. Anyone can speak at any time.
- C. No criticism.
- D. Encourage unusual ideas.
- E. Piggy-backing is allowed.
- F. Evaluate and prioritize **after** all ideas are listed.

VI. NOMINAL GROUP TECHNIQUE

- A. NGT is a simple five-step process:
 - 1. Silent generation of ideas.
 - 2. Recording ideas.
 - 3. Clarification.
 - 4. Voting.
 - 5. Scoring.
- B. Advantages of NGT.
 - 1. Assures participation of each group member.
 - 2. Prevents domination of the group by any one person.
 - 3. Each person has an equal vote on the final outcome.
 - 4. The structured process prevents unproductive discussions, arguments, etc.
 - 5. Many ideas are generated.

Demonstration of Nominal Group Technique

What is Nominal Group Technique?

- Method of structuring small group meetings.
- Helpful in identifying problems, exploring solutions, and setting priorities.
- Assures participation of each person.
- Neutralizes power/status differences among group members.
- Eliminates domination of the process by any individual.
- Works best with 5 to 10 group members.
- Requires from 60 to 90 minutes.

How to Prepare

1. Formulate the NGT question.
 - a. Keep it simple.
 - b. Phrase it in such a way that you're sure to get the type of response you want.
 - A poor NGT question would be: "What's bothering you?"
 - A good NGT question would be: "What problems are reducing our company's effectiveness?"
2. Assemble supplies (easel pad, easel, markers, masking tape, index cards).
3. Write the question clearly on a easel pad and post on front wall.
4. Arrange chairs in a U shape, if possible.

The Opening Statement

- Emphasize the importance of the task.
- Note the value of each person's contributions.
- Explain the goal of the meeting.
- Briefly summarize the process.

The Nominal Group Techniques Process

Step 1: Silent Generation of Ideas In Writing

1. Read question aloud.
2. Tell group members to respond to the question in writing.
3. Group members must work silently and independently.
4. Allow about 5 minutes for completion of this step.

Step 2: Round-Robin Recording of Ideas

1. Go around the room and get one idea from each person.
2. Write ideas on easel pad.
3. **Allow no discussion.**
4. Keep going around the room until all ideas are listed.
5. Number items as you record.
6. Encourage hitchhiking. (When someone else's idea triggers you to think of another idea you hadn't considered.)
7. Group members may pass and reenter on the next round.
8. As you fill up a sheet, tear it off and tape it on wall so that it's visible to everyone.

Step 3: Clarification of Listed Ideas

1. Clarify each idea.
2. Cut off discussion of an idea as soon as it is understood by the group.
3. Do not allow arguments or justifications--each person will have an opportunity to vote in next step.
4. Combine duplicate items.
5. Eliminate inappropriate items (personnel problems, problems which cannot be solved at company level).

Step 4: Voting

1. Each person receives five index cards.
2. Ask members to select the five most critical problems and write one of them in the center of each card.
3. Advise them to write the item's number from the list in the upper left-hand corner of each card and to write the item itself across the center of each card.

For example:

20	
Poor Performance at Structure Fires	Poor Performance at EMS Call

4. Have group members spread all five cards out in front of them on the table.
5. Select the most important card and write **5** in the lower right-hand corner. Turn the card over.
6. Select the least important of the remaining cards. Write **1** in the lower right-hand corner. Turn the card over.
7. Select the most important of the remaining cards. Write **4** in the lower right-hand corner. Turn the card over.
8. Select the least important of the remaining cards. Write **2** in the lower right-hand corner.
9. Write **3** in the lower right-hand corner of the remaining card.

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Poor Performance
at Structure Fires



Poor Performance
at EMS Call

3

Step 5: Recording and Scoring

1. Collect cards and shuffle.
2. Record all votes on easel pad.
3. Lead a discussion on voting pattern.
4. Resist suggestions to add individual rankings to get a consolidated score for each item. An item that received votes of 2, 1, 1, 1 would have a total of 5, but would carry more weight than an item that received a single vote of 5.

VI. CHECKING PRIORITIES

- A. Who benefits?
- B. Is it cost-effective?
- C. What is the impact on company performance?

VII. PROBLEM-SOLVING METHODS

- A. Intuitive.
- B. Minimum effort.
- C. Politically-based.
- D. Systematic.
- F. Level of participation.

VIII. SITUATION ANALYSIS

- A. Determine causal factors.
 - 1. Ask lots of questions.
 - 2. Separate symptoms from causes.
- B. Identify assets.
- C. Force field analysis is a useful tool for this step.

IX. FORCE FIELD ANALYSIS

Five steps:

- A. Define the problem and goal.

- B. List driving forces.
- C. List restraining forces.
- D. Estimate relative strength of each force.
- E. Estimate your ability to influence the forces.

Three possible conditions:

- 1. Driving forces outweigh restraining forces--okay to proceed.
- 2. Restraining forces outweigh driving forces and you have little potential for influencing restraining forces--reconsider.
- 3. Driving and restraining forces are about equal--work on eliminating or reducing restraining forces.

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Activity PS.1

Generating Alternative Strategies

Purpose

To use brainstorming and force field analysis to decide on priority strategies for problem-solving.

Directions

You will follow brainstorming rules to generate ideas about how to increase or decrease high-impact forces, which are asterisked on the posted lists.

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X. SUMMARY

- A. General responsibility of the Fire/EMS Officer.
- B. Relationship between service delivery and needed resources.
- C. Problem-solving: a critical skill.
- D. Identifying and prioritizing problems.
- E. Brainstorming.
- F. NGT.
- G. Checking priorities.
- H. Problem-solving methods.
- I. Situation analysis.
- J. Force field analysis.

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GENERAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE FIRE/EMS OFFICER

The most important company responsibility is to carry out an assigned mission within the department. The Fire/EMS Officer is the link between the fire/EMS department administration and the firefighters/emergency medical technicians (EMTs) and is responsible for transforming departmental goals into specific actions. The Fire/EMS Officer, therefore, must allocate available resources to meet company needs.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SERVICE DELIVERY AND NEEDED RESOURCES

The community depends on the fire/EMS department for effective and efficient delivery of essential services. In order to assure availability of such **services** or **outputs** (EMS, fire suppression, fire prevention, etc.), the community provides necessary **resources** or **inputs** (personnel, apparatus, equipment, etc.) to the department. The department must manage available resources in a way that ensures its ability to deliver required services effectively. This is accomplished by establishing and maintaining **effective managerial processes** throughout the department. Thus, the Fire/EMS Officer is responsible for such processes at the company level.

PROBLEM-SOLVING: A CRITICAL SKILL

In order to fulfill the basic responsibility of contributing to the efficient operation of the fire and life safety system, the Fire/EMS Officer must allocate resources to meet needs. Before allocating resources, the Fire/EMS Officer must be able to identify the needs of the company. Allocating resources--which are often inadequate, to satisfy needs--which are often overwhelming, is one of the greatest challenges to managers of all levels. The Fire/EMS Officer must establish priorities. Problems arise when the needs of individuals or groups cannot be met, especially when their priorities are different from those of the allocator.

The Fire/EMS Officer has to make judgments/decisions about whether existing processes are adequately meeting individual and group needs of the company. Problems generally arise when existing processes fail to meet existing needs. Then the Fire/EMS Officer must establish problem-solving priorities.

Often all problems are blamed on management. Perceived problems often focus on lack of personnel or equipment (resources) and overlook how things are working (processes). While such an approach offers an easy way out for the Fire/EMS Officer, it simply avoids the real issues. In actuality, many problems can and should be solved at the company level without management involvement or support.

Admittedly, a few problems cannot be solved without management intervention, particularly ones which are caused by insufficient resources. But even these problems can be influenced in ethical and productive ways from the company level. Participative management implies that employees from all levels within an organization participate in and contribute to the problem-

solving process. (Participation in this context can mean giving input, rather than being the actual problem-solver.)

It's the Fire/EMS Officer's responsibility to identify and solve problems which can be taken care of at the company level and to inform management about other critical problems which require upper-level attention.

IDENTIFYING AND PRIORITIZING PROBLEMS

The Fire/EMS Officer has needs and priorities to be satisfied and resources to be allocated, and, when these cannot be properly balanced, problems often result.

What is a problem? A problem exists when there is a difference between the actual situation and the desired situation. A problem exists whenever there is a gap between the way things are and the way they ought to be. The greater the gap, the bigger the problem.

The Fire/EMS Officer has to decide how much input is needed from company members in order to identify and prioritize company problems.

Advantages

There are distinct advantages to getting a maximum amount of input from all company members. Using a group process:

- allows the Fire/EMS Officer to hear about problems from company members' perspectives;
- generates more ideas--the Fire/EMS Officer gets a better picture of all problems;
- meets subordinates' need to be involved;
- heightens subordinates' awareness of conflicting needs and the complexity involved in trying to balance such conflicts; and
- generates subordinate interest in solving company problems.

Disadvantages

But, there are also some potential disadvantages to the group process:

- Usually takes more time.
- Cliques and conflicts sometimes develop.
- Individuals may have little interest in participating.
- Interacting groups may waste time on interpersonal relationships.

- Ideas are sometimes evaluated prematurely.
- Conformity may inhibit idea generation.
- Certain people can dominate discussion and some are not heard.

Two techniques have been designed to overcome the disadvantages listed above: Brainstorming and NGT. Both techniques can be used effectively for identifying problems and/or generating solutions. The NGT is particularly helpful in identifying a number of problems **and** establishing priorities for problem-solving efforts.

Generating Alternative Strategies

Alternative strategies are actions that could reduce or eliminate the difference between the actual and the desired situation. For each driving and restraining force, identify actions you must take in order to increase or reduce the force.

Choosing From Alternatives

Evaluate each of the alternative strategies.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of each?

Do you have the resources necessary?

Are group members committed?

Is it cost-effective?

Which one(s) are critical to reaching your stated goal?

CHECKING PRIORITIES

After problems have been prioritized the Fire/EMS Officer needs to do a final check before committing resources to solving identified problems. The following questions will help determine whether solving a problem is worth the required time and effort.

- Who will benefit if the problem gets solved? Highest priority should go to problems which impact on the public (quality of service, etc.).
- Will it save money?
- What's the impact on company performance? Will solving the problem enhance company effectiveness?

If solving the problem will not have a direct or indirect effect on quality of service, cost of operations, or company performance, then the problem is questionable as a valid priority.

PROBLEM-SOLVING METHODS

The first method is intuitive, which is based on hunches, gut feelings, and is not systematic. The second is minimum effort. Judgments are based on a limited number of alternatives. An alternative is selected because it is good enough, rather than the best one. This method is sometimes called "satisficing."

The third method is politically based. The problem is diagnosed in terms of preferences and power of other parties affected by decision. Consequences of alternatives are assessed in terms of acceptance or resistance by other parties. Judgments are based on compromise, and implemented in a way that considers stake and political position of involved parties.

The fourth method is systematic. The problem-solver:

- relies on measurable objectives to achieve a goal;
- has explored all possible alternatives;
- knows relative pros and cons of each; and
- always chooses the alternative(s) that maximize(s) the attainment of the goal.

There are a fixed number of steps in the process. This method represents the ideal.

SITUATION ANALYSIS

First, determine causal factors. For example: What are the symptoms? Who is involved? What is the standard? What exactly is happening? Where is the problem occurring? When does it occur?

Some problems will have only one cause; others will have several. Many errors in problem-solving can be traced to confusing symptoms with causes. Symptoms are what happened such as, decreased productivity, lower quality, poor morale, and communication breakdowns. Causes are why it happened.

Next, identify factors which can contribute to reaching your goal (assets).

Finally, explore alternative strategies for reaching your goal and prioritize.

FORCE FIELD ANALYSIS

Force field analysis is a tool for organizing and analyzing information during the situation analysis step.

It may be used individually or by a group.

The procedure is as follows:

- Clearly define the problem and goal by stating the difference between the actual and the desired situation.
- List the forces that are driving the problem toward solution. These forces can be individual, organizational, or external.
- List the restraining forces that are preventing movement toward solution. These forces can also be individual, organizational, or external.
- Make estimates of the relative strength of each of the driving and restraining forces.
- Make estimates of your ability to influence each force.

One of three conditions will result:

1. If the driving forces outweigh the restraining forces, simply proceed.
2. If the restraining forces heavily outweigh the driving forces and if you do not have any possibility of reducing restraining forces, you should probably reconsider your goal because your probability of success is limited.
3. If the driving and restraining forces are about equal you should resist the temptation to push harder on the driving forces because the restraining forces will push back even harder. Rather, focus on reducing or eliminating the restraining forces.

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GLOSSARY

1. **Force field analysis**--a tool for organizing and analyzing information during a problem-solving process.
2. **Goal**--a broad statement of what you wish to accomplish.
3. **Intuitive method of problem-solving**--based on hunches, gut feelings.
4. **Minimum effort method of problem-solving**--a process where alternatives are investigated only until a satisfactory solution (one that minimally satisfies the objectives) is found.
5. **Nominal Group Technique**--a technique for structuring group meetings, which assures participation and neutralizes power/status differences.
6. **Objective**--a specific description of an expected outcome to be attained over an identified period of time.
7. **Political method of problem-solving**--a process that selects a solution based on the preferences and power of parties affected.
8. **Problem**--a difference that exists between an actual situation and a desired situation.
9. **Problem-solving**--a process that results in eliminating the gap between desired performance and actual performance.
10. **Systematic method of problem-solving**--a rational process whereby the problem-solver knows his/her objectives and has them ranked in order of importance, has explored all possible alternative solutions, knows the relative pros and cons of each, and always chooses the alternative(s) that maximize(s) potential attainment of the goal.

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DECISIONMAKING STYLES

OBJECTIVES

The students will:

- 1. Differentiate among the three decisionmaking styles and the five processes identified.*
 - 2. Match appropriate decisionmaking styles to given situations using the Vroom-Yetton-Jago model.*
 - 3. Cite the advantages and potential disadvantages of group decisionmaking.*
-

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Activity DM.1

Selecting a Decisionmaking Style, Part 1

Purpose

To differentiate between decisionmaking styles.

Directions

In each of the following situations a decision needs to be made. Assume that you are the Fire/Emergency medical services (EMS) Officer or Station Officer (SO) described. For each situation, select one of the styles listed below for determining a final decision.

Style A (Autocratic)	--	Fire/EMS Officer makes decision without input from others.
Style C (Consulting)	--	Fire/EMS Officer makes decision after consulting with one or more subordinates.
Style G (Collaborative)	--	The whole group makes the decision together (Fire/EMS Officer and subordinates).

NOTE: For this activity, ignore the questions on "Applicable Guideline(s)" and "Inappropriate Style(s)." These will be covered later in the module.

Situation 1

As a Fire/EMS Officer, you have a problem with a subordinate. This subordinate has been extremely tense and antagonistic for the past few shifts. You have reason to believe family problems are the cause of this behavior. Some action needs to be taken. Which style will you use?

Decisionmaking Style _____

Applicable Guideline(s) _____

Inappropriate Style(s) _____

Situation 2

A new policy has been implemented by the department; firefighters/emergency medical technicians (EMTs) will now perform building inspections in their down time. Initially, your crew was opposed to the new policy but they are now resigned to the idea. You have a 30-day deadline for submitting a 12-month plan for conducting inspections in your district. Which style will you use?

Decisionmaking Style _____

Applicable Guideline(s) _____

Inappropriate Style(s) _____

Situation 3

You are the captain of a volunteer fire/EMS department. One of your subordinates has been somewhat obnoxious lately. You've just now noticed a heavy odor of alcohol as this subordinate attempts to mount the vehicle to respond to an incident. Some action needs to be taken. Which style will you use?

Decisionmaking Style _____

Applicable Guideline(s) _____

Inappropriate Style(s) _____

Situation 4

Department policy is that crews on duty on Christmas Day may invite family members to the station for dinner between 2 and 5 p.m. Each SO has been requested by headquarters to make a final decision within 1 week about what time dinner will be served at the station. As SO, which style will you use?

Decisionmaking Style _____

Applicable Guideline(s) _____

Inappropriate Style(s) _____

Situation 5

You are a brand new Fire/EMS Officer in charge of a truck company. Your crew are seasoned veterans with excellent skills. Your experience as a firefighter/EMT was limited to rescue. The department is developing a new performance-based evaluation system. You have been requested to recommend performance standards for your crew. Which style will you use?

Decisionmaking Style _____

Applicable Guideline(s) _____

Inappropriate Style(s) _____

Situation 6

The department has just hired its first female firefighter/EMT and she will be assigned to your company. Company members resent the department's decision to hire females and you've overheard them discussing ways to make her life miserable. The station has one large open bathroom/shower area. The chief has ordered you to work out a procedure that will protect the new firefighter's/EMT's right to privacy. Which style will you use?

Decisionmaking Style _____

Applicable Guideline(s) _____

Inappropriate Style(s) _____

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I. INTRODUCTION TO DECISIONMAKING

A. Definitions.

1. A decision is a choice made between two or more alternative options.
2. Decisionmaking is the process of deliberation which leads to a final course of action.
3. Not making a decision is, in fact, decisionmaking.
4. Data gathering and evaluation of assembled information is not a decision.

B. Decisionmaking process.

1. Define the problem.
2. Collect information.
3. Generate alternative options.
4. Evaluate alternative options.
5. Select one option.

C. Relative importance of decisions depends on:

1. How many people affected?
2. Is there an impact on mission, goals, etc.?
3. What would be the consequences of a bad decision?

D. Types of negative consequences:

1. Physical harm.
2. Psychological harm.
3. Loss or misuse of money.
4. Loss of leadership credibility.
5. Decreased productivity.

- 6. Decreased morale.
- 7. Negative impact on department mission.
- E. The importance of decisionmaking.
 - 1. Decisions can positively or negatively others.
 - 2. Effective decisions are based on a logical process.

II. THE LEADER'S ROLE IN DECISIONMAKING

- A. Effective decisionmaking:
 - 1. Does not necessitate making every decision yourself.
 - 2. Requires ability to use different styles appropriately.
- B. Controlling decisionmaking processes.
 - 1. Amount of participation by subordinates.
 - 2. Type of participation.
- C. The Vroom-Yetton-Jago Decisionmaking Model.
 - 1. Style A--Autocratic.
 - 2. Style C--Consulting.

3. Style G--Collaborative.

D. Variations in leaders' influence styles.

III. SELECTING THE RIGHT STYLE

A. Factors to consider.

B. Decisionmaking guidelines.

(See Matrix)

Decisionmaking Style Selection Guide

The following matrix may provide insight into the decisionmaking process. It is designed to help you select an appropriate decisionmaking style. Ask the guideline questions listed in the left-hand column. If you answer "yes" to any question, eliminate consideration of those styles which have an "N."

Remember, these are guidelines, not absolutes. Your choice of style will be dependent upon your situation, group culture, and what you know about your subordinates.

"N" = Not Recommended

"P" = Potentially Productive

Guideline Questions	Decision Styles				
	Autocratic Style A		Consulting Style C		Collaborative Style G
	A-1	A-2	C-1	C-2	G-2
1. Is an immediate decision required?	P	P	N	N	N
2. Does the leader lack adequate expertise?	N	N	P	P	P
3. Do subordinates lack adequate knowledge?	P	P	P	P	N
4. Are subordinates apt to sabotage goals?	P	P	P	P	N
5. Is the problem complex with little available information?	N	N	N	P	P
6. Is commitment by subordinates critical to implementation?	N	N	N	P	P
7. Are autocratic decisions likely to be rejected and/or is there conflict among subordinates?	N	N	N	N	P
8. Will decisions impact most subordinates?	N	N	P	P	P
9. Will decisions impact only select subordinates?	N	N	P	P	N

Activity DM.2

Analyzing Decisionmaking Styles

Purpose

To match appropriate decisionmaking styles to given situations using the Vroom-Yetton-Jago Model.

Directions

1. Watch Scenario 1 from the video "Analyzing Decisionmaking Styles."
2. Each group should answer the question: What decision is required?
3. Discuss as a table group the answers to the guideline questions, referring back to the Decisionmaking Style Selection Guide.
4. Be prepared to recommend the appropriate style.
5. This process will be repeated for video Scenarios 2 and 3. Scenario 4 may be a role play or large group discussion.

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Activity DM.2 (cont'd)

Video Scenario 1

What decision is required: _____

1. Is an immediate decision required?
2. Does leader lack adequate expertise?
3. Do subordinates lack adequate expertise?
4. Are subordinates apt to sabotage goals?
5. Is problem complex with little available information?
6. Is commitment by subordinates critical to implementation?
7. Are autocratic decisions likely to be rejected and/or is there conflict among subordinates?
8. Will the decision affect most subordinates?
9. Will the decision affect only one or a select few subordinates?

Most appropriate style: _____

Video Scenario 2

What decision is required: _____

1. Is an immediate decision required?
2. Does leader lack adequate expertise?
3. Do subordinates lack adequate expertise?
4. Are subordinates apt to sabotage goals?
5. Is problem complex with little available information?
6. Is commitment by subordinates critical to implementation?
7. Are autocratic decisions likely to be rejected and/or is there conflict among subordinates?
8. Will the decision affect most subordinates?
9. Will the decision affect only one or a select few subordinates?

Most appropriate style: _____

Video Scenario 3

What decision is required: _____

1. Is an immediate decision required?
2. Does leader lack adequate expertise?
3. Do subordinates lack adequate expertise?
4. Are subordinates apt to sabotage goals?
5. Is problem complex with little available information?
6. Is commitment by subordinates critical to implementation?
7. Are autocratic decisions likely to be rejected and/or is there conflict among subordinates?
8. Will the decision affect most subordinates?
9. Will the decision affect only one or a select few subordinates?

Most appropriate style: _____

Role-Play Scenario 4

What decision is required: _____

1. Is an immediate decision required?
2. Does leader lack adequate expertise?
3. Do subordinates lack adequate expertise?
4. Are subordinates apt to sabotage goals?
5. Is problem complex with little available information?
6. Is commitment by subordinates critical to implementation?
7. Are autocratic decisions likely to be rejected and/or is there conflict among subordinates?
8. Will the decision affect most subordinates?
9. Will the decision affect only one or a select few subordinates?

Most appropriate style: _____

Role-Play Exercise: Scenario 4

*The scenario is inside a station break room, where an **OFFICER** and **three FIREFIGHTERS/EMTs** are seated at a conference table. The **OFFICER** is finishing up the meeting with the last item on his/her agenda.*

*Notes or instructions for the reader are **not indented** and should not be read out loud. Dialogue, or text to be read in the role-play exercise, is indented under the name of each character.*

OFFICER

Okay, here's the last item of interest. The chief is going to bring a new transmitting personal alarm safety system (TPASS) for us to test out for a couple of months.

FIREFIGHTER/EMT #1

A what?

OFFICER

An additional personal alarm safety system--a "TPASS." It's one of those new little pieces of equipment that you attach to your self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA). If you get lost, it can send a signal to the Incident Commander (IC), or if you're unconscious and can't move around, the IC will receive a message and we'll be able to find you.

FIREFIGHTER/EMT #1

I've heard about that. They are like a PASS, but send a signal to a receiver monitored by the IC.

FIREFIGHTER/EMT #2

Are you going to test it, Officer?

OFFICER

That's the problem. We're only getting one, so instead of me testing, I'm going to give it to one of you. You three are going to have to decide who will use it.

FIREFIGHTER/EMT #3

What's this test all about?

OFFICER

OK, here are the parameters we want. Whoever uses it is going to have to keep a log--let us know what fire calls it was used on and how it performed. The big problem we've been having is, say you're pulling a hoseline and stop in a hall to listen, sometimes they're "falsing," you know, going off when they shouldn't. We need to get your thoughts on exactly how you feel about the thing, whether the batteries are acting up, or whether it's falling off the SCBA. We need a complete log/diary of this device.

FIREFIGHTER/EMT #2

Do we get in trouble if we break it?

OFFICER

No, in fact checking its endurance will go along with the test, so hang in there and see if you can destroy it.

FIREFIGHTER/EMT #2

Any more money for testing it?

OFFICER

No, no more money involved. It's just a test to see if we're going to get them for all the personnel.

FIREFIGHTER/EMT #1

I'd like to test it.

FIREFIGHTER/EMT #2

I wouldn't mind doing it either.

OFFICER

Tell you what, why don't you go ahead and discuss it before you get to your housework and get back to me immediately.

(Gets up from the table and leaves the room.)

FIREFIGHTER/EMT #2

I want to do it because I....

FIREFIGHTER/EMT #1

You always get the special jobs.

FIREFIGHTER/EMT #2

No...

END

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IV. USING GROUPS EFFECTIVELY

- A. Three levels of group participation:
 - 1. Advisory (Style C-2).
 - 2. Shared decisionmaking (Style G-2).
- B. Set the stage.
 - 1. Tell group what role they're playing.
 - 2. Set Style C ground rules.
 - 3. In Style G, explain consensus.
- C. Advantages of group participation.
- D. Potential disadvantages.
- E. The leader as facilitator:
 - 1. Time limits.
 - 2. Brainstorming or Nominal Group Technique (NGT).
 - 3. Gatekeeping.
 - 4. Objectivity and logic.

5. Devil's advocate.

6. What if...

V. CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE DECISIONMAKERS

A. Synoptic.

B. Dissatisfied.

C. Sensitive.

D. Catalytic.

E. Opportunistic.

F. Skill-directed.

G. Innovative.

H. Forward-thinking.

I. Resourceful.

J. Evaluative.

K. Expedient.

L. Courageous.

Activity DM.1 (cont'd)

Selecting a Decisionmaking Style, Part 2

Purpose

To differentiate among the three decisionmaking styles and five processes identified.

Directions

Refer to the Activity Worksheet you used at the beginning of the module. Also, refer to the Decisionmaking Style Selection Guide.

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VI. THREE DECISIONMAKING PRINCIPLES

- A. Make the decision.
- B. Implement and evaluate.
- C. Recognize that you probably cannot satisfy everyone.
- D. Recognize that you have the **organization** to think about now--you are a fire/EMS leader!

VII. SUMMARY

- A. Decisionmaking affects all other leadership functions.
- B. Rational decisionmaking involves using:
 - 1. A systematic process.
 - 2. An appropriate decisionmaking style.
- C. Effective decisionmakers:
 - 1. Are aware of own strengths and limitations.
 - 2. Seek to improve the quality of their decisions.
 - 3. Accept responsibility for decisions.
 - 4. Know that due to circumstances beyond their control, they are masters of their fate and captains of their souls.

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NATURE AND OVERVIEW OF DECISIONMAKING

Planning, problem-solving, goal-setting, and decisionmaking share much in common: these and the remaining management functions must be predicated on meeting the stated mission of the fire/EMS department. Planning, problem-solving, and goal-setting each involve decisionmaking. Decisionmaking is the one managerial function at every level of the organization that directly affects and overlaps all others. Ultimately, the effectiveness of the fire/EMS agency depends upon the decisions that are made, be they rendered by the chief officer, the first-line supervisor, or the group.

Any **decision is a choice made between two or more possible alternative actions**. Therefore, **decisionmaking is the process of deliberation**, which leads to a final course of action. Less important decisions may sometimes be made intuitively--relying on hunches or gut feelings. However, more important decisions require a more rational, logical approach. **Systematic decisionmaking requires the following steps:**

- define the problem;
- collect information;
- generate alternative options;
- evaluate alternative options; and
- select one option for implementation (make the decision).

As a general rule, the most important decisions are those that will impact many people, those that impact on departmental mission or goals, and/or those that could potentially cause serious negative consequences. Thus, quite often such decisions are referred to as "high-risk" decisions.

A Fire/EMS Officer is judged by the results of the decisions made. Few make mostly wrong decisions. Effective **leaders** make many high-quality decisions; they seldom make mistakes and, on the few occasions that they do, they learn from those errors. Inexperienced decisionmakers and Fire/EMS Officers who make poor and mediocre decisions often rely upon their personal experiences and preferences, previous decisions, or on what others have done (past practice) or are doing (imitation). While past experience and tradition may be an invaluable source of data for reference (**assuming quality decisions were made**), what happens when a new question or problem arises for which there is no precedent on which to draw? Trial and error? Hunch? The effective decisionmaker, on the other hand, consistently uses a purposeful and rational decisionmaking approach, matching the decisionmaking style to the situational characteristics.

THE LEADER'S ROLE IN DECISIONMAKING

Relationship Between Leadership and Decisionmaking

While leadership and decisionmaking are separate and unique, leadership obviously necessitates decisionmaking--be it on the fireground or at the station. While leader-made decisions are obviously necessary on the fireground, are leader-made decisions necessary and/or desirable in noncritical situations? What is the role of the leader in decisionmaking?

The leader's role in decisionmaking, too, has been variously described. Vroom suggests we might view it as **controlling the processes by which decisions are made in that part of the organization for which he or she is responsible** (Victor Vroom, *Decisionmaking and the Leadership Process*, *Journal of Contemporary Business*, Autumn, 1974).

How do leaders control the decisionmaking processes? Essentially by determining the **extent and type of opportunity provided to subordinates to participate** in making decisions.

Three Decisionmaking Styles

Style A--Autocratic

The leader makes the decision alone. Discussion is limited to collecting relevant information.

Style C--Consulting

The leader shares the decision issue with one or more subordinates--seeking ideas, opinions, and suggestions--and then makes a decision. All suggestions are carefully and objectively considered by the leader. The final decision may or may not be influenced by subordinate input.

Style G--Group Process

The leader and the subordinates work together (as a group) until they arrive at a consensus decision. (All group members have an equal opportunity to air their opinions and argue for their point of view.) All suggestions are carefully and objectively considered by each group member. All group members **accept** the final decision and are **committed** to supporting its implementation.

Variations in Influence

As the leader moves from Style A to Style G, his/her influence over the final decision drops from 100 percent to almost zero. Yet, no matter which style is used, the leader retains ultimate responsibility and accountability! Thus, it's important to understand **when** to use various styles in order to maximize potential success.

Factors to Consider

Obviously, some decisionmaking styles are more appropriate for certain situations. Key questions affecting the leader's choice of a decisionmaking style would include the following:

- Do you have a reasonable amount of time?
- Does the leader have enough expertise to make a quality decision?

- Do subordinates have enough expertise to make a quality decision?
- Do the subordinates share the organizational goals to be attained by solving the problem?
- Is the decision area complex with many possible solutions?
- Is commitment to the decision by subordinates critical?
- Is the decision likely to cause serious conflict among subordinate(s)?
- Will the decision directly impact most subordinates?
- Will the decision directly impact only a select few?

Decisionmaking Guidelines

The preceding questions have been converted to a series of guidelines that assist leaders in selecting an appropriate style.

Guideline 1 (Time): If an immediate decision is required, Styles C and G should not be considered.

Guideline 2 (Leader Expertise): If the leader does not possess adequate expertise to make a quality decision, Style A should not be considered.

Guideline 3 (Subordinate Expertise): If the subordinate(s) lack(s) the knowledge or expertise necessary to make a quality decision, then Style G should not be considered.

Guideline 4 (Goal Compatibility): If subordinates do not appear to share organizational goals, Style G should not be considered.

Guideline 5 (Degree of Complexity): If the decision issue is complex and little information is available, and if the problem is ill-defined--for a quality decision, Style A should not be considered.

Guideline 6 (Commitment): If commitment of subordinates is critical to effective implementation and/or autocratic decisions are likely to be rejected by subordinates, Style A should not be considered.

Guideline 7 (Commitment With Conflict): If commitment is critical to effective implementation, if autocratic decisions are likely to be rejected, and/or if there is likely to be serious conflict among subordinates in methods to attain goals, Styles A and C should not be considered. The selected style must allow for the venting of differences and resolution of the issue with full knowledge of the situation by everyone involved.

Guideline 8 (Group Consequence): If a decision will have similar and nearly equal impact upon a number of individuals, styles that involve only one or a few of those affected should be eliminated from consideration. Each of those affected should have the opportunity for input and influence in the decisionmaking process. Avoid Style A.

Guideline 9 (Individual Consequence): If a decision is to affect only one individual or a select few, styles that introduce uninvolved subordinates should be eliminated from consideration. Opportunity for the affected individual to influence the decision should be provided to maximize his/her acceptance and commitment to the decision. Avoid Styles A and G.

Vroom, V.H. and A.G. Jago. *Decisionmaking as a Social Process*, *Decision Sciences* 5 (1974): 749.

USING GROUPS EFFECTIVELY

Approaches to Group Decisionmaking

Group decisionmaking occurs when a group of people discuss the problem or decision issue and render a decision. The decision may be advisory or actual; the decision may be by democratic process (majority) or consensus.

Both of the latter points need to be clearly spelled out at the beginning of any group decision-making activity. If the group decision is to be advisory, group members should be made aware of this at the outset; otherwise, a number of advantages may be lost and impair future group productivity as well as leader-subordinate relations. By the same token, if the group is told the leader will support and abide by the decision it reaches, the leader should, in fact, follow through and abide by it. Any parameters within which the group must work should be clearly specified at the outset.

With the group's role in the decisionmaking process clearly delineated, the second issue requires comment. In democratic group process, decisions are made on the basis of majority votes. Although sometimes necessary to reach a decision, the democratic decisionmaking process may create disharmony, conflict, and even divisiveness among coworkers. The manager should be alert to the symptoms of a win-lose mind set and intervene before it becomes a reality and a problem.

Consensus decisionmaking is a collaborative approach in which all involved in the decisionmaking process work together **as a team** and work through differences of opinion without generating a win-lose atmosphere. Everybody is heard; everyone listens. Everybody concurs with the decision (although it may be no one's real preference) and agrees to support it, and, everyone wins, including the organization. Because of the common goal orientation, the problem-solving (collaborative) focus and common frame reference emerging, understanding and support of and commitment to the decision is enhanced.

Whether the decision is to be democratic or consensus, any parameters surrounding an acceptable decision must be defined (limit to spending, limits on other resources, etc.).

Advantages of Group Decisionmaking

Group decisionmaking offers a number of potential advantages over individual decisionmaking. The first advantage is the greater potential, total knowledge, information, and/or opinion it offers. With each group member bringing into the decisionmaking his/her own background knowledge and experience, frame of reference, and creativity, possibilities are multiplied with each member.

The same factors contribute to the probability of a more thorough examination of the issue and a greater number of ideas, approaches, and alternatives being generated. Analysis and evaluation of alternatives will tend to be more thorough and complete. The result: the probability of a better decision as opposed to a "satisficing" one. Because they have been involved from the beginning in the decisionmaking process, group members will better understand and appreciate the decision, accept the decision, and commit themselves to the decision.

Apart from resulting in better decisions and greater commitment to the decision, there are other advantages. Group decisionmaking is a highly motivational tool. You, the leader, have shown your trust in their knowledge, ability and judgment (self-esteem). You have given them some control over their lives in the workplace (stress-reduction benefit).

Reaching a decision, especially on a problem lacking clear definition and structure, provides them with a real sense of accomplishment (achievement). Group decisionmaking also contributes to the professional growth of the members. They not only learn and practice decisionmaking skills to help prepare them for leadership roles, but also increase their understanding and tolerance for diversity. They learn to examine ideas from perspectives other than their own--including the management perspective.

Potential Advantages and/or Disadvantages

Several phenomena associated with group decisionmaking may well be positive attributes--unless they go too far. These factors are disagreement (versus conflict), time, and risk-taking.

One of the advantages most frequently cited is greater input. Because of the scope and diversity of viewpoints, it is assumed the best choice will emerge. Honest disagreement, controversy, and exchange are healthy. What happens when conflict becomes counterproductive? Group process may break down. Even if an excellent decision is made, negative feelings may persist. The skilled group leader/facilitator will watch for symptoms of impending conflict and strive to defuse the potential crisis. Separating the people from the problem and focusing on interests, not positions, are two guidelines the leader must practice in his/her own interactions with group members and stress to group members to thwart vocal disagreement from becoming a detriment to group progress.

Time requirements can also be an asset or a liability in group decisionmaking. Because of the greater number of input sources, and often greater diversity of opinion going into the group decisionmaking process, groups typically need greater amounts of time to move through the

decisionmaking process. Because of the **greater time expended** in generating and evaluating alternatives, and the more thorough analysis and discussion, the quality of the decision may well be higher. But if the process is rushed, the advantages of group decisionmaking are lost. Hence, if minimum time is available to reach a decision, an individually made decision may be the better style.

The potential liability is simply stated: cost. Cost in time away from regular job function and/or in overtime. The leader must consider using group decisionmaking from a cost-effective viewpoint in determining whether or not to use it.

Earlier the issue of system versus risk in decisionmaking was addressed. Groups tend to be more willing to take risks in decisionmaking. Change necessitates risk; however, change for the sake of change may be neither productive nor healthy. Careful evaluation of alternatives is essential by the group to ensure calculated risk-taking.

Potential Drawbacks (Disadvantages) of Group Decisionmaking

Group decisionmaking is not without several potential drawbacks. Social pressures (apart from group think) may be involved. Social pressure is a major factor in conformity. Within groups, members of social cliques or work crews may feel the necessity of supporting the informal leader or most vocal member of their twosome or threesome and hence fail to be totally open and honest in sharing their ideas and opinions. There is the possibility of less than professional trade-offs on the part of the group members to gain support for their decisions.

Interpersonal obstacles such as personality conflicts, unique psychological needs of some individuals (such as the need to dominate), even the overly talkative can interrupt the group decisionmaking process. The leader/facilitator must be alert to impending problems in this area, and if necessary, talk with the responsible individual(s) in private.

Another problem that can emerge in group decisionmaking is that of hidden agendas, an ulterior motive. Often this ulterior motive entails a vested self-interest in the outcome of the group's decision. This person may dominate, intimidate, or refuse to be cooperative with others in arriving at a collaborative decision. The presence of this individual cannot only impede the progress of the group in rational decisionmaking, but also can impact the members' morale and enthusiasm, resulting in a less-than-optimal decision. The discussion leader should be aware of those with such hidden agendas.

In regard to the preceding obstacle potentials, it must be remembered that groups tend to bring out the **best** and the **worst** in individuals. The use of group decisionmaking may unduly raise the expectations of subordinates with reference to outcome of the decision (overnight changes) and future involvement. It is important that the Fire/EMS Officer helps subordinates keep their involvement in perspective.

CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE DECISIONMAKERS

The success of a Fire/EMS Officer is not a matter of luck or fortune. It's a composite of knowledge, skills, effort, and personal attributes. Sometimes described as movers, shakers, goers, and doers, effective leaders also make effective decisions. Marvin identifies what he believes to be the 12 most common characteristics of effective decisionmakers. Effective decisionmakers are

Synoptic: They focus on the big picture, considering all possible opportunities and potentials.

Dissatisfied: They have an inherent preoccupation to make the best better.

Sensitive: They continuously and consistently exercise acute sensitivity to others and their environment.

Catalytic: They make things happen and assume personal responsibility to do so.

Opportunistic: They take advantage of opportunities and even create opportunities where there seemingly are none.

Skill-directed: They do not play trial and error; they rely on things they do well and make the most of available inputs and resources.

Innovative: They are creative and draw upon the creativity and strengths of others.

Forward-thinking: They look to the future and search for (more) opportunities.

Resourceful: They use the expertise and ideas of others, involving them in decisionmaking as appropriate.

Evaluative: They know what they are doing, asking the right questions and pursuing the answers to those questions.

Expedient: They get things done.

Courageous: They take calculated risks and they act, accepting responsibility for the things they do.

The professional Fire/EMS Officer will compare decisionmaking characteristics to that of effective decisionmakers. Doing so enables one to identify areas to strive for growth, enhancing decisionmaking skills. Dare to improve yourself and your decisionmaking skills. Make a decision **to do so** and act!

THREE DECISIONMAKING PRINCIPLES

The confident Fire/EMS Officer knows that there are three summary principles involved in effective decisionmaking regardless which style of decisionmaking is used.

Make the Decision

First, the Fire/EMS Officer makes a rational decision. In making nonprogrammed decisions, the Fire/EMS Officer follows the purposeful decisionmaking process and adapts the decisionmaking style to match the nature of the decision. A decision is made.

Implement and Evaluate

After reaching a high-quality decision, the effective decisionmaker implements it, and not only implements the decision, but also monitors its impact. The effective decisionmaker is alert for unforeseen consequences and acts to avoid unnecessary disruption caused by the decision. He/She implements the decision and evaluates results.

Recognize That You Probably Cannot Satisfy Everyone

The effective decisionmaker recognizes that in reality, one cannot expect to satisfy everyone every time one makes a decision. The decisionmaker realizes that even with the collaborative consensus approach some will likely be less than enthusiastic about any given decision.

The effective Fire/EMS Officer is not striving to win a popularity contest, or to be one of the group. The ultimate decision must reflect and contribute positively to the good of the group and the firefighter/EMT service. The Fire/EMS Officer doesn't try to satisfy everyone. The Fire/EMS Officer will be judged by the quality of the decisions that are made.

SUMMARY

Decisionmaking is the one managerial/leadership function that directly affects and overlaps all other functions.

Rational decisionmaking requires the decisionmaker to use a systematic process along with the appropriate style.

Effective decisionmakers are aware of their own strengths and limitations. They seek to improve the quality of decisions made and accept responsibility for their decisions.

They understand that the well-known adage applies to them: "Due to circumstances beyond my control, I am master of my fate and captain of my soul."

GLOSSARY

1. **Decision**--A choice made between two or more alternative options.
2. **Decisionmaking**--A process of deliberation that leads to a final decision.
3. **Rational Decisionmaking**--A systematic process that relies on defining the problem, collecting information, generating multiple alternatives, and analyzing various alternatives in order to select the most appropriate decision.
4. **Consensus Decisionmaking**--A collaborative approach in which everyone is heard and all views are carefully considered. Everyone supports the final decision even if it is not their preferred solution.

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PLANNING SKILLS FOR THE FIRE/EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES OFFICER

OBJECTIVES

The students will:

1. *Discuss the planning process used in the fire/emergency medical services (EMS).*
 2. *Identify three types of plans.*
 3. *Describe the effect the plans have on the Fire/EMS Officer.*
 4. *Develop goals and objectives needed for planning.*
 5. *Identify components of an action plan.*
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Activity PL.1

Types of Plans

Purpose

To identify the types of plans that are currently used.

Directions

1. List and discuss, in your small group, all of the plans you develop, use, or impact your daily events.
2. Place answers on an easel pad and then select a group spokesperson to present one group's findings.

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II. DEFINITIONS

A. Strategic Planning.

1. Management tool.
2. Used for only one purpose--to do a better job.
3. Disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization is, what it does, and why it does it, with a focus on the future. (Adapted from *Bryson's Strategic Planning in Public Nonprofit Organizations*.)
4. Process is strategic.

B. Master Plan.

III. ANY PROGRAM SHOULD HAVE A PLAN

- A. Training.
- B. Staffing Plan.
- C. Fire Prevention Plan.
- D. Vehicle Maintenance Plan.
- E. IAP.
- F. Disaster Plans.

IV. ESTABLISHING GOALS

- A. Focus on a solution.
- B. A goal is a broad statement of what you wish to accomplish.
- C. Goal: to improve company performance at structure fires or advanced life support (ALS) event (that includes more personnel).
- D. Evaluate your goal.

V. SETTING OBJECTIVES

- A. Writing objectives.
 - 1. An objective is a specific description of an expected outcome to be attained over an identified period of time.
 - 2. An objective must spell out the "ABCDs."
 - 3. Objectives should define what you intend to accomplish as specifically as possible.
 - 4. Example: "By November 1, our crew will successfully complete four structure fire drills at the training tower."

A. Developing action plans.

B. Implementing the plan--putting the plan to work.

C. While the present alternative is being implemented, think of the next alternative you will try if this one doesn't work.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY		Goal: 5-2 Bicycle Safety and Helmet Program Program Manager: Comm. Risk Officer										Accreditation Criterion "Risk Management" Accreditation Category:				
Objective: By June 201_, the station commander at the Cleveland Park station, with assistance of coalition, will conduct two rodeos per year.		Estimated Startup Cost: \$1,200 Estimated Annual Cost: \$400														
Task #	Task	Responsibility	Days	Cost	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
1	Research rodeo criteria	Comm. Risk Officer	6	\$100	x											
2	Develop training manual	Comm. Risk Officer	4	\$200		x										
3	Develop/Build rodeo prop	Planning Group	7	\$500			x									
4	Train fire/coalition personnel	Comm. Risk Officer	1/2					x								
5	Schedule rodeo	Station Commander	1/2					x				x				
6	Publicize event	Publicity Chair	14	\$300					x				x			
7	Conduct rodeo	Fire/Coalition personnel	2	\$100						x				x		
Totals			32	\$1,200												

Activity PL.2

Developing a Plan

Purpose

To identify goals, objectives, and components of an action plan.

Directions

1. A presidential visit is being planned for your community in 90 days. In your group, discuss and decide what type of plans needed to be in place to manage this event from a fire department's point of view.
2. Develop goals and objectives for your plan.
3. What would have to be included in your action plan?
4. What would you need to monitor?
5. Select a spokesperson to report on group findings.

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VIII. CHARACTERISTICS OF GOOD PLANNERS

- A. Leadership skills.
- B. General management skills.
- C. Communication skills.
- D. Fire/EMS Officers may not be as involved in the process as chiefs, but are plan development integral in the execution of the plan.

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TYPES OF PLANS

Strategic Plan and Master Plan

- departmentwide
- mission
- vision
- goals
- objectives

Staffing Plan, Training Plan, Fire Prevention Plan, Public Education Plan, Vehicle Maintenance Plan

- more Fire/EMS Officer oriented;
- affects daily routine;
- lays out a pattern;
- detail oriented; and
- understood by all.

Incident Action Plan

- incident specific; and
- used to mitigate situation.

Disaster Plan

The disaster plan is a pre-event plan that creates a framework of response for an event. This is a broad-based approach.

DEFINITIONS

Strategic Planning

Strategic planning is a management tool. It is used for only one purpose--to do a better job. It is helpful in focusing energy and ensuring that members are working toward the same goals. This planning can be used to assess and adjust an organizations direction in response to a changing environment.

Strategic planning is a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization is, what it does, and why it does it, with a focus on the future (Adapted from *Bryson's Strategic Planning in Public Nonprofit Organizations*).

The process is strategic. It involves preparing the best way to respond to the circumstances of an organization's environment, whether or not its circumstances are known in advance. Fire/EMS department often must respond to dynamic and even hostile environments. Strategic planning is about being clear about organization's objectives. Strategic planning requires being aware of an organizations resources and incorporating both into being consciously responsive to a dynamic environment.

Master Plan

A comprehensive master plan is based on the following fundamental vision:

The master plan describes the broad vision for the city's future. It is the core philosophy that directs all development activities. It guides where and in what form development occurs in the community and frames the city's capital improvement projects. It is used to test the appropriateness of both public and private development proposals. During the life of the plan, decisions will be made on land use issues and budget priorities. These decisions will be judged by the extent to which they correspond with the master plan.

The master plan is a compilation of goals, policies, and recommendations for each of the subject area it covers. The goals are conceptual, broad, and long range. The policies are the guides to achievement of the goals. Recommendations define specific actions needed to accomplish the overall goal as well as policies.

The master plan has a 20-year timeframe. Some States mandate that the master plan be reviewed or amended every 6 years. This helps ensure that the document is updated to reflect conditions and philosophy.

ANY PROGRAM SHOULD HAVE A PLAN

Training

- yearly;
- quarterly;
- monthly;
- by topic; and
- mandated training takes priority.

Staffing Plan

- Per memorandum of understanding (MOU)/contract;
- or based on National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1710, *Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Operations, and Special Operations to the Public by Career Fire Departments* and 1720 *Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Operations and Special Operations to the Public by Volunteer Fire Departments*;
- or based on your departments standard operating procedures (SOPs);
- long range--growth, retirements, hiring; and
- short range--minimum staffing.

Fire Prevention Plan

- fire prevention bureau staff;
- company inspections;
- volunteers;
- occupancy overload inspections; and
- development and community growth.

Vehicle Maintenance Plan

- annual
- quarterly
- monthly
- daily

Incident Action Plans

The IAP formally documents incident goals (known as control objectives in National Incident Management System (NIMS)), operational period objectives and the response strategy defined by incident command during response planning.

The IAP contains general tactics to achieve goals and objectives within the overall strategy, while providing important information on event and response parameters.

The IAP facilitates dissemination of critical information about the status of response assets themselves. Because incident parameters evolve, action plans must be revised on a regular basis (at least once per operational period) to maintain consistent, up-to-date guidance across the system.

The following should be considered for inclusion in an IAP:

- Incident goals (where the response system wants to be at the end of response).
- Operational period objectives (major areas that must be addressed in the specified operational period to achieve the goals or control objectives).
- Response strategies (priorities and the general approach to accomplish the objectives).
- Response tactics (methods developed by Operations to achieve the objectives).
- Organization list with Incident Command System (ICS) chart showing primary roles and relationships.
- Assignment list with specific tasks.
- Critical situation updates and assessments.
- Composite resource status updates.
- Health and safety plan (to prevent responder injury or illness).
- Communications plan (how functional areas can exchange information).
- Logistics plan (e.g., procedures to support Operations with equipment, supplies, etc.).
- Responder medical plan (providing direction for care to responders).
- Incident map (i.e., map of incident scene).
- Additional component plans, as indicated by the incident.

Disaster Plans

Natural Disasters and Effect on EMS Capabilities

- earthquake;
- fire or wildfire;
- flood and dam failure;
- hurricane and high wind;
- landslide;
- thunderstorm;
- tsunami;
- volcano;

- extreme cold; and
- extreme heat.

Manmade Disasters

- bioterrorism;
- chemical agents;
- pandemics and diseases;
- radiation emergencies; and
- terrorism.

ESTABLISHING GOALS

Focus on a solution when you are establishing goals. A goal is a broad statement of what you wish to accomplish.

Goal: to improve company performance at structure fires or ALS event (that include more personnel).

Evaluate your goal by asking the following questions: Is it realistic? Is it important? Is it challenging?

SETTING OBJECTIVES

Writing objectives

An objective is a specific description of an expected outcome to be attained over an identified period of time. An objective must spell out "ABCD":

Audience--who will do it?

Behavior--what must be done?

Conditions--by when, where, how?

Degree--quantity and quality expected.

Objectives should define what you intend to accomplish as specifically as possible. For example: "By November 1, our crew will successfully complete four structure fire drills at the training tower."

DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING ACTION PLANS

An action plan is a step-by-step outline of work that needs to be done in order to meet the stated objective. Each objective requires its own action plan. A good plan requires that you:

- determine and assign tasks;
- assign responsibility for monitoring;
- plan for evaluation;
- determine timeframes;
- identify needed resources; and
- document completion of each task.

Implementing the plan

Now you have a complete set of objectives for reaching a specific goal. Each objective has a clear and concise action plan. Individuals can now go to work on their assigned action plan steps. Coordination and communication are essential.

While the present alternative is being implemented, think of the next alternative you will try if this one doesn't work.

MONITORING AND EVALUATING

The Fire/EMS Officer needs to monitor each activity. Make sure tasks are completed correctly and on time. Amend the plan where necessary (unanticipated events, inability to meet specified deadlines, etc.). Keep all work group members informed of progress.

Evaluating--Did it Work?

Completion of the problem-solving process requires an indepth evaluation. Evaluation is taking a "lessons learned" approach. This allows you to capitalize on noted strengths and weaknesses in your next problem-solving venture. Bring the work group back together and evaluate the total project in terms of both **outcome** and **process**.

Possible questions include

- Did we meet our stated goal?
- What did we do right?
- What did we do wrong?
- What could we have done better?

Almost no project ends without bringing to light additional problems of which you were unaware. Thus, the process begins again.

Monitoring and evaluating can indicate discrepancies in the plan that necessitate cycling back to earlier parts of the process. The problem-solving model is a continuing process, not one where you follow the steps once and are automatically successful.

CHARACTERISTICS OF GOOD PLANNERS

Leadership Skills

- vision and strategy;
- establishing direction;
- aligning people;
- communicating;
- negotiating;
- motivating and Inspiring;
- influencing organizations; and
- overcoming barriers to change.

General Management Skills

- planning;
- finance and accounting;
- personnel administration;
- technology;
- organizational development;
- delegation;
- team building;
- conflict management; and
- solving problems.

Communications Skills

- writing;
- listening;
- speaking;
- presenting;
- media relations;
- public relations; and
- meeting management.

Fire/EMS Officers may not be as involved in the process as chiefs, but are plan development integral in the execution of the plan.

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COMMUNICATIONS FOR THE FIRE/EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES OFFICER

OBJECTIVES

The students will:

1. *Describe different types or methods most commonly used to communicate.*
 2. *Discuss what makes communication effective given different situations.*
 3. *Identify organizational tattoos that prevent effective communication.*
-

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I. TYPES OF COMMUNICATION

A. Verbal--how we speak.

1. Language.
2. Vocabulary, slang, industry terminology.
3. Simply the words.

B. Nonverbal.

1. Body language.
 - a. Face.
 - b. Arms, hands.
 - c. Movement, posture.
2. How we stand or face each other.
 - a. Males typically at 90-degree angles.
 - b. Women stand more face-to-face.

- C. Paraverbal--it's not **what** you say, but **how** you say it.
 - 1. Tone of voice.
 - 2. Volume.
 - 3. Enunciation.
 - 4. Sarcasm can be sensed.
 - 5. Emphasis on the wrong word can give different meaning:
 - 6. Pausing.
- D. Written communication.
 - 1. Business writing.
 - 2. Report writing.
 - 3. Personnel documentation.
 - 4. Personal correspondence.

5. Email.
6. Social networking sites and blogs.

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Activity CM.1

How Do You Communicate?

Purpose

To discuss what makes communication effective in different situations.

Directions

1. Complete Part 1 of the activity individually.
2. Complete Part 2 in small groups.
3. Be prepared to report on your group's discussion with the class.

Part 1

1. List three recent conversations that you thought "went well."

2. List three recent conversations that you thought "didn't go very well."

3. What are the differences in the two lists?

Part 2

1. In your group, discuss how you typically communicate with your:
 - a. Supervisor.
 - b. Subordinates.
 - c. Spouse or significant other.
 - d. Children.
 - e. Authority figures (judges, legislators).
 - f. Friends.
2. Are they different? How? Why?

II. ORGANIZATIONAL TATTOOS

- A. Informal monikers.
 - 1. Reputation.
 - 2. Behavior.
 - 3. Education.
 - 4. Association with others.
- B. You give them; you probably have one (or more).
- C. A one-time incident can lead to a lifetime tattoo. Do what you can to get a positive one:
 - 1. Ethical.
 - 2. Fair.
 - 3. Good listener.
 - 4. Good trainer.
 - 5. Team player.

- D. Negative tattoos are often destructive to the individuals and cause organizational dysfunction.
 - 1. Opportunities are missed because we can't see past someone's tattoo.
 - 2. Good ideas are discounted simply because of the person that offered it.
 - 3. Bad ideas are embraced for the same reason.
 - 4. Good people are not allowed to grow to their full potential.
- E. How to get rid of organizational tattoos.
 - 1. Stop the behavior that got you there in the first place.
 - 2. Allow the time to pass to have the tattoo "fade."
 - 3. Replace a negative tattoo with a positive one.
 - 4. Supervisors must discourage placing negative tattoos on their people.

Activity CM.2

Organizational Tattoos in Practice

Purpose

To identify organizational tattoos that prevent effective communications.

Directions

1. Six to eight chairs will be placed in the center of the room in a circle. These six to eight people represent a fire/emergency medical services (EMS) department management team and are going to be asked to hold a meeting to discuss and solve a problem. The fire/EMS chief cannot attend the meeting, but has tasked the group to discuss the issue thoroughly and provide him/her with a recommendation.
2. Each member of the group will receive a hat to put on prior to the discussion starting. On that hat is the organizational tattoo that person has in the fire department. **You are not allowed to look at your own hat.** You will know everyone else's tattoo, but you will not know your own. Respond to other students based on their tattoo. It may become apparent to you what it is as the discussion progresses.
3. The group will have 20 minutes to discuss the issue and to generate a recommendation for the fire/EMS chief.

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TYPES OF COMMUNICATION

Humans communicate in many ways and most of the time do a pretty good job of knowing what is said and what is meant. However, there are so many ways in which we communicate, we can't use just one sense or one sensor to determine the actual meaning of communications.

Fire/EMS Officers/Supervisors have to set the example in effective communication for their crew. Be aware of how you communicate--not just talk. Walk the talk.

Verbal

Verbal communication is how we speak. It is simply the words. This includes our language--vocabulary, slang, and industry terminology. Different regions of the country have different meanings for a lot of what we do as an industry. That is one reason why the Incident Command System (ICS) clear text is so important.

Nonverbal

Scientists have discovered that over 65 percent of the messages we send are done so via nonverbal communications. We say so much without saying a thing. Nonverbal communication can come through body language--face, arms, hands, movement, or posture.

Another nonverbal communicator is the way we stand or face each other. Males are typically at 90-degree angles. For males, facing each other is perceived to be hostile or an attempt to dominate. Women tend to stand more face-to-face. To women, this is not a confrontational position.

Paraverbal

Paraverbal is not **what** you say, but **how** you say it. This includes things like tone of voice, volume, and enunciation. Sarcasm can be sensed. So can a condescending tone or anger. Emphasis on the wrong word can give the sentence a different meaning. In these days of having to be so politically correct, a supervisor cannot take the chance of being accused of harassment simply by how something is said.

Pausing can change the meaning of what is being said as well.

Written Communications

All written communications, especially documentation of work-related events are extremely critical for the Fire/EMS Officer.

Business Writing

Fire/EMS Officers need to know how to write a professional letter, a memorandum, and a formal thank you letter.

Report Writing

Fire/EMS department reports are read by many people--lawyers, insurance adjusters, news media, medical professionals and judges. Your reports need to be

- complete;
- accurate;
- factual;
- legible;
- consistent;
- per policy; and
- objective, not subjective.

Personnel Documentation

"If you didn't write it down, it didn't happen."

All of the elements listed above for reports hold true for personnel documentation. In many cases, this documentation arises when there is administrative or legal action pending against the employee.

Personal Correspondence

Personal correspondence includes personal notes, thank you notes, and letters of commendation. These are best if handwritten. Make sure that they are legible and short, but from the heart.

Email

If you are at work, keep your email professional. Both grammar and spelling are important. Do not use "texting" shorthand when writing work-related emails.

Most work email is subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and can be retrieved through legal discovery--all of it. Check with your legal counsel for your State's laws.

Social Networking Sites and Blogs

Be very careful about what you say. You are not as anonymous as you think you are. You should follow organization standard operating procedures (SOPs) and consult legal advice, as there are always legal, ethical, moral, and professional factors to consider when using social networks.

ORGANIZATIONAL TATTOOS

Organizational tattoos are informal monikers that we pick up during our career. Most of the time we are unaware of them when we get them. This is because most of them are negative and are obtained through a variety of factors:

- reputation;
- behavior;
- education; and
- association with others.

It only takes a one-time incident to get a lifetime tattoo. By understanding that we are all going to end up with one at some point, you can decide to make yours a positive one:

- ethical;
- fair;
- good listener;
- good trainer; and
- team player.

Negative tattoos are often destructive to the individuals and cause organizational dysfunction. Opportunities are missed because we can't see past someone's tattoo. A good idea will be discounted simply because of the person who offered it. Bad ideas can be embraced for the same reason. Good people are not allowed to grow to their full potential.

How to get rid of organizational tattoos:

- Stop the behavior that got you there in the first place.
- Allow the time to pass to have the tattoo "fade."
- Replace a negative tattoo with a positive one.
- Supervisors must discourage placing negative tattoos on their people.

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APPENDIX

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More than skin deep: Organizational tattoos

Wherein the author explains and explores an esoteric area of fire department culture. How many foreheads can *you* read?

By Capt. Phil Davis
Benicia (Calif.) Fire Department

You have one (or more), and you give them, too. You can see them on others when they can't. They know all about yours, but you can't see it. We all have them.

Have what?

I'm talking about "organizational tattoos," those informal monikers we pick up during our careers. Some of our tattoos change as we are promoted or change assignments, while others last a lifetime.

How do I know? Have you ever attended a retirement dinner for a colleague after an illustrious 35-year career? What do they talk about? Right — how he got the organizational tattoos.

Some, such as nicknames, are common knowledge. Others are hidden from the person, because they're so defamatory they could destroy him or her. We generally consider organizational tattoos as negative, but there are instances where positive tattoos have gotten people in trouble.

There are tattoos groups bring on themselves. Can you tell which shift is on duty by what's on the TV? Do you have the MTV crowd? The VH-1 baby-boomers? The TNN gang?

And which group is it that arrives at work on motorcycles? In pick-up trucks? You know what I mean.

Now we have a working knowledge of what an organizational tattoo is. In today's fire departments, these tattoos are often destructive to the individuals and cause organizational dysfunction.

In the big picture, perhaps if we all have them, then tattoos must not be bad and must be the organizational norm. No, in the big picture, we miss opportunities because we can't see past a tattoo. To truly understand organizational tattoos,

you must first analyze how we get them, how we retain them and how we get rid of them.

Tattooing in action

Organizational tattoos aren't just a theory. Everyone knows they exist. The concept is even written into the California Fire Academy's curriculum for the Chief Officer Certification course, Management 2A, "Organizational Development and Human Relations."

To reinforce the points about organizational tattoos, an activity was created in which six to eight members of the class are asked to volunteer for a small group activity. They are seated in a circle in the middle of the classroom surrounded by the remaining students.

They are told that they are a fire department management team at a special staff meeting. The meeting was called by the chief of the department, who cannot attend because of a conflict. The group's task is to develop the implementation plan for NFPA 1500 for their department (or some other equally challenging task).

The catch is that the instructor puts a paper hat on each participant, and each hat has an organizational tattoo written on it. The other members of the group can see your hat and you can see theirs, but you can't see your own tattoo. The group keeps everyone in character by treating each other according to their tattoos. Some examples are:

- Backstabber
- Expert
- Pity Me
- Loser
- Prankster
- Comedian
- Ignore Me
- Chief's Informant

The group now tries to solve the problem. If it's not already hard enough to implement 1500, combine that with the preconceived attitudes we have toward some people. It's a funny activity, but the ramifi-



cations of tattoos become obvious almost immediately.

No matter how good the ideas are from some people (Loser, Pity Me), they are discounted and put down. No matter how ridiculous some ideas are from others (Expert), they are treated as plausible solutions.

Now tell me this doesn't happen in fire service organizations every day.

Let me give you a few examples. How many good people have been passed over for a promotion because of an organizational tattoo? How many people are not allowed to develop to their full potential because of a tattoo? How many good fire service instructors aren't allowed to expand their horizons because of an organizational tattoo? How many people leave the fire service (career or volunteer) because of an unfavorable tattoo?

Getting tattoos

Critical incident stress debriefings are becoming the norm in the modern fire service, but that hasn't been the case for very long. Only a few years ago, firefighters who didn't deal well with stress were given some very unflattering tattoos. Some left the fire service. Most didn't, and their tattoos remain.



Keith J. Taylor

How would your organization react to a rookie who ran out of a live training burn? Would he be looked on as a coward, or just as an inexperienced firefighter who might have potential? And a new officer who gets tongue-tied on his or her first major rager? I predict a tattoo coming.

Many of you have taken the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator or a similar personality index that places you in a category, that labels you. A tattoo is a label, and once you get a label it's tough to change.

Given that you *will* get tattoos, try to get ones that are flattering and positive. Tattoos such as "professional," "ethical," "fair," "good listener" and "team player" give us a positive picture of the individual, even if we know nothing else about him or her.

Getting rid of tattoos

A tattoo is simply a symbol of a behavior a person had or has and how others perceived it. It will usually tend to hang on as a matter of course, whether the individual continues the behavior or not.

(If a tattoo is positive, of course, you can choose to perpetuate it by maintaining the relevant behavior.)

Fortunately, it is possible to get rid of or at least dilute a tattoo by changing the behavior.

Time is the best dilution ingredient. The "law of recency" is relative here. The more recent the behavior, the stronger the recollection of that behavior.

You can erase tattoos, but it takes time and you have to be conscious about changing or avoiding the behavior. Some people leave one department for another in hopes — consciously or unconsciously — of dropping old tattoos or maybe picking up new ones.

What often happens, however, is that the behavior resurfaces and so does the tattoo. Don't ever forget that firefighters from your old department talk to firefighters in your new department. Tattoos can transfer with you from one department to the next.

Tattoos up close

Here are a few examples of specific tattoos we see in many departments.

■ "Expert" — Anyone can become an expert on something. The department might "make" you an expert, for example, a hazmat specialist, paramedic, fire prevention

specialist or disaster-preparedness coordinator.

These tattoos have both positive and negative sides. It's gratifying to be considered the local expert on something, but it can become a negative when you are tattooed an expert in one field and excluded from others. How many of us have heard, "What could you know about fire investigation? You're a paramedic." The divisiveness among fire service specialties is partly a result of organizational tattoos.

The tattoo of expert around the fire station is not limited to department duties. It might have a lot to do with a side job or other specialty acquired outside of work. Most fire departments have their construction experts, computer experts and writing experts.

■ "Troublemaker/Malcontent" — It might have been 15 years ago, but people remember, don't they? Because "trouble" is in the eye of the beholder, the reason or the underlying history doesn't really matter.

The "troublemaker" tattoo is a tough one to shed, too; it might follow you for your entire career. Promotions will be tougher to attain, and credibility will be non-existent until you remove the tattoo. Union officers and activists are often labeled as troublemakers, even though the union has a legitimate role in the organization and the cause might be right.

■ "Goof-off" — Akin to the troublemaker tattoo is the goof-off tattoo. It's tough to be taken seriously when the goof-off tattoo is glaring off your forehead.

This presents a big problem when you are testing for a promotion or especially when trying to establish credibility with your subordinates. Have you ever noticed how hard it is for the goof-off — or even the former goof-off — to reprimand subordinates for goofing off?

Similarly, some of the best practical jokers forget their prior behavior when they become officers. Your tattoo is still showing, chief.

■ "Educated" — It's as if your degree were tattooed on your face. The fire service is becoming more educated, and we are seeing entry-level applicants coming in with associate's and baccalaureate degrees.

As a result, the fire service is breaking into two camps: those with the education tattoo and those without. "He's book smart — no experience, though" or "The chief hired another college boy."

You can imagine the characteristics that go along with other tattoos such as "Reckless/Careless," "Loser," "Know-it-all" and "Yes-

man." The list of tattoos could go on and on. You know them well, because you wear them and you give them.

Supervisors and tattoos

It does the department no good to create an environment where negative organizational tattoos are acceptable. If a chief recognizes tattoo-driven perceptions or behavior, how can he or she deal with that constructively? You have to be an investigator and determine the origin of the tattoo and whether the wearer knows he or she has it.

Find out who gave the tattoo, and why, and how long it has been on. When was the last behavior that reinforced the tattoo? These are all complex individual and organization behavior patterns and practices that must be evaluated.

Supervisors have choices when it comes to handling organizational tattoos. You can do and say things to accentuate and perpetuate positive tattoos in your people. An example might be a comment like, "That hazmat call went great, thanks to our resident hazmat guru, Steve."

Another option is to not comment when you hear references to a tattoo. This condones the reference

A tattoo is simply a symbol of a behavior a person had or has and how others perceived it. It will usually hang on, whether the behavior continues or not.

without reinforcing it and can be seen with both positive and negative tattoos. As a supervisor, you do not have to get directly involved, because peer pressure is in effect. One example that comes to mind is the firefighter who pays back shift trades grudgingly. No one will work a trade for him or her, knowing how unreliable that person is in paying back.

Destructive tattooing has to be stopped, however, because it damages the individual and the department. This isn't simple criticism we are talking about: it is character assassination and defamation. In your role, you must stop the behavior of the tattooers, even if you agree.

If references to old tattoos keep creeping into conversations, it is the fire officer's role to help bury those tattoos, not resurrect them. Remind your subordinates that old tattoos do not draw an accurate picture of how things are today: "Quit harping on the way Sam used to be. He's not like that now, and you know it. Create new, positive tattoos where old ones once existed.

An organizational tattoo is finally nothing more than a perception, but as Tom Peters, the management guru, wrote, "Perception is reality and perceptions are never neutral."

An organizational tattoo is like a first impression: it just takes a second or two to get, and a lifetime to get rid of. Be careful about the tattoos you get and the ones you give. Sometimes they aren't very flattering, and they don't wash off in the shower.

Phil Davis is a captain and department training officer for the Benicia (Calif.) Fire Department. He holds a bachelor's degree in health science and a master's degree in public administration, as well as state certifications as a fire officer, chief officer and master instructor. Davis teaches resident and extension courses as an adjunct instructor and curriculum developer for the National Fire Academy and is a part-time faculty member for the University of California-Davis hazmat training program.

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