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Perceptions of Company Officer Competency by Firefighters and Company Officers of Norfolk Fire-Rescue

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PERCEPTIONS OF COMPANY OFFICER COMPETENCY
BY FIREFIGHTERS AND COMPANY OFFICERS OF
NORFOLK FIRE-RESCUE

A Research Study Presented to the Faculty of
the Department of STEM Education and Professional Studies
at Old Dominion University

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science in Occupational and Technical Studies

By

Paul E. Savage, Jr.

August 2010

SIGNATURE PAGE

This research paper was prepared by Paul E. Savage, Jr. under the direction of Dr. John M. Ritz in OTED 636, Problems in Occupational and Technical Studies. It was submitted to the graduate program director as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Science Degree in Occupational and Technical Studies.

Approved by: _____ Date: _____

John M. Ritz, DTE

Advisor and Graduate Program Director

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Paul E. Savage, Jr.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

The American Fire Service has evolved from a volunteer bucket brigade organized by Benjamin Franklin to a highly trained force of men and women, career and volunteer, who provide a wide range of emergency and non-emergency services in rural, suburban, and urban communities. The job description of a firefighter in the United States includes a number of duties in addition to the expected requirement to extinguish fires. Today, there is an expectation that fire departments are capable of not only extinguishing fires, but also technical rescue, hazardous materials emergency response, and emergency medical care. Access to these services is almost universally available throughout the nation by dialing 911.

A capable, trained, and well-led workforce is required in order to safely and successfully mitigate the variety of emergencies that fire departments respond. First level supervisors are responsible for preparing subordinates to perform a wide variety of tasks that must be performed emergently, with precision, in unpredictable and often harsh environments that also pose a potential risk to the safety of the responding personnel. These supervisors are also responsible for the direct supervision of firefighters at emergency scenes, and they participate in the performance of a number of tasks as team members with their subordinates.

Due to the emergent nature of the work, the Fire Service is organized as a scalar, paramilitary organization. Entry level firefighters in Norfolk Fire-Rescue hold the title of Firefighter/Emergency Medical Technician-Enhanced, which represents their level of

emergency medical certification by the Commonwealth of Virginia, Office of Emergency Medical Services. Firefighters may be promoted to the rank of Firefighter/Emergency Medical Technician-Intermediate and Firefighter/EMT-Paramedic with advanced training. Each of these ranks is not considered supervisory, although personnel with advanced technical training will provide guidance at some emergencies in order to accomplish specific, protocol driven tasks.

The first formal supervisory rank in Norfolk Fire-Rescue is Lieutenant. Promotion to Lieutenant represents a transition, similar to the distinction between an enlisted member and an officer in the military services. Lieutenants are generally assigned as the officer in charge of a Ladder Company or Rescue Company and act as a station commander in the absence of a Captain, the next senior officer. The transition from Firefighter to Lieutenant requires mastery of new competencies in addition to the technical ability to perform emergency services tasks. These new officers must also possess the leadership skills and abilities to properly perform the duties of their new rank.

Presently, candidates for promotion to Lieutenant are required to successfully complete the Fire Officer 1 course that is offered by the Virginia Department of Fire Programs. This course provides instruction on management techniques, budgeting, firefighting strategy and tactics, and other duties of company level officers. New company officers are often assigned to stations that have a senior Captain who is expected to serve as a mentor. No other formal instruction is offered or required for company officers.

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standard 1021 provides a list of competencies that are expected for the Fire Officer 1 level (National Fire Protection Association, 2009). This study will compare the perception of firefighters and company officers of current company officer qualifications based on NFPA 1021.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The problem of the study was to compare the perception of Norfolk Fire-Rescue firefighters, Lieutenants, and Captains of the level of competency of Norfolk Fire-Rescue company officers as prescribed by NFPA standard 1021. The results may be used to determine leadership and develop training needs for company officers of Norfolk Fire-Rescue.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following questions were developed to help frame the study and help determine the answer to the research problem:

RQ₁: Are there differences between the perception of firefighters and company officers of the qualifications of current company officers as described by NFPA 1021?

RQ₂: Do firefighters perceive officers as qualified leaders?

RQ₃: Do company officers perceive themselves to be qualified leaders.

RQ₄: Does tenure of service of the respondents affect perception?

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

The fire service in the United States has evolved into an all-hazards response profession that provides a variety of critical services to communities throughout the nation. New responsibilities require advanced training of firefighters in such areas as hazardous material emergency response, technical rescue, and emergency medical care as well as traditional firefighting duties. Qualified leaders are necessary to lead these efforts safely, efficiently, and effectively.

National standards exist to describe competencies that first-level Fire Service officers should possess. The National Fire Protection Association Standard 1021, 2009 edition, lists these competencies. However, this is an industry standard, and compliance is not mandated by law unless the standards are formally adopted by a local jurisdiction. As such, compliance to the standards are voluntary and intermittent. Therefore, qualification of fire officers varies greatly across the nation. This study will attempt to determine the perceptions of firefighters and company officers of current front line fire officer qualifications based on the national standard. The findings of this study may help guide future officer training programs.

LIMITATIONS

The findings of this research will be limited by the size and scope of the research, and the individual perceptions of the survey participants. Norfolk Fire-Rescue is an all career municipal fire department that protects a city with a population of just over 250,000 residents with a staff of five-hundred-fifteen uniformed members. Additionally, Norfolk Fire-Rescue provides advanced life support emergency medical care services as

well as ambulance transport. This does not represent every fire department in America. Therefore the expected duties of company officers and firefighters may vary greatly from fire departments with other missions and staffing levels.

ASSUMPTIONS

The assumptions of this study are necessary in order to clarify the context of the research. It will be assumed that all officers of Norfolk Fire-Rescue have successfully completed the Fire Officer 1 program as delivered by the Virginia Department of Fire Programs. It will also be assumed that the National Fire Protection Agency Standard 1021 is the recognized standard for company officer qualifications in the United States. Finally, it is assumed that all of the respondents are employees of Norfolk Fire-Rescue.

PROCEDURES

Respondents will be randomly selected from the employees of Norfolk Fire-Rescue. This will include personnel at the firefighter, Lieutenant, and Captain ranks. The survey will consist of questions developed to assess officer competencies as listed in NFPA 1021. Respondents will answer questions that measure their perception of the individual qualifications of incumbent company officers. The information will be tabulated and organized in order to illustrate findings. Descriptive statistical methods will be used to analyze, compare, and establish conclusions.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

This section is provided to clarify key terms that are included in this study.

These definitions are specific to the context of the study.

Captain—A member of Norfolk Fire-Rescue who serves as a senior company officer, usually a station commander.

Company Officer—Officers at the Lieutenant and Captain ranks of Norfolk Fire-Rescue.

EMS—Emergency Medical Services.

Firefighter—The first level, non-supervisory uniformed employee of Norfolk Fire-Rescue who provides emergency response services.

Lieutenant—A member of Norfolk Fire-Rescue who serves as a junior company officer, usually in charge of a specific fire apparatus and the assigned crew.

NFPA—The National Fire Protection Association.

NFPA—1021-National Fire Protection Association Standard for Officer Qualifications.

NFR—Norfolk Fire-Rescue.

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

This research study will be divided into five chapters. Chapter I will introduce the reader to the study which is designed to compare the perception of firefighters, Lieutenants, and Captains of Norfolk Fire-Rescue regarding the competencies and qualifications of company officers of Norfolk Fire-Rescue. Respondents will answer

survey questions based on the national standard for Fire Officer qualification, the National Fire Protection Association Standard 1021. The results of the survey may help to identify the training needs for company officers of Norfolk Fire-Rescue.

Chapter II will provide a review of the literature. Current information regarding public safety leadership development will be gathered and organized. Chapter III will describe the methods and procedures that were used to develop the survey and analyze the data. Chapter IV will present the findings of the study in an organized manner. Finally, Chapter V will provide a summary, conclusions, and recommendations that may result from the findings of the research.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter reviewed the literature that detailed the responsibilities and expectations of newly promoted officers in the fire-rescue services, as listed by the National Fire Protection Association Standard 1021. Additionally, parallels were drawn between the duties and expectations of junior military leaders and the fire-rescue officers. Finally, scholarly references are presented that illustrate the benefits and limitations of subordinate and self-surveys.

National Fire Protection Association Standard 1021

The National Fire Protection Association establishes voluntary, consensus standards that are used as industry standards for fire and life safety (NFPA, 2009). These standards are non-binding but are used voluntarily by organizations as best-practices.

NFPA 1021 addresses professional standards for fire service personnel from junior officers to senior leadership. These standards describe the competencies that are necessary for fire-rescue officers to carry out their duties as required by their current position in the organization. This study examines the perceived adherence to the Fire Officer I Standard, which applies to the first level of supervision in the fire-rescue service. These officers are called “company officers”, typically fire lieutenants and fire captains.

The NFPA 1021 document provides seven categories of competencies at the Fire Officer I level: general, including prerequisites for the role, human resource management,

community and government relations, administration, inspection and investigation, emergency services delivery, and health and safety (NFPA, 2009). These standards will be used to compare the perception of the competency of Norfolk Fire-Rescue company officers by company officers and subordinates (firefighters).

Fire-Rescue Leadership Development

There is little information available regarding leadership development in the Fire-Rescue Service. Firefighters are often promoted to company officer with little formal preparation to the new role. Shoebridge (2006) notes that “all too often, an individual may transition from firefighter to fire officer overnight; one day the person is led, the next day he is the leader” (p. 99). Shoebridge also claims that newly promoted officers often have “little or no training in management, supervision and leadership, specifically in the art of human behavior” (p. 99). Sargent (2006) describes the initial transition from firefighter to company officer: “The transition to first-line company officer is the most difficult, because you are fundamentally a working foreman. You live, eat, sleep, and work each day, doing many of the same tasks on the fireground as before, especially in short-staffed companies, yet you are the leader and manager of the team” (p. 231).

Solid leadership ability is a critical element for success in fire-rescue operations today. The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, provided a catalyst for federal government attention to the system that government agencies, including first responders and others, use to efficiently mitigate natural and man-made disasters, and day to day emergencies (Anderson, Compton, & Mason, 2004). The National Incident Management System, commonly referred to as “NIMS” is a structured command and control system

that is now used throughout the United States to manage emergencies. One of the core principles of NIMS is the division of labor by limiting the number of subordinates that report to a single supervisor, known as span of control (Anderson et al., 2004). Officers are responsible for the actions and safety of their subordinates, which can be challenging to junior officers with limited leadership experience.

Firefighter safety is the primary responsibility of company officers. The ability to ensure the safety is dependent not only on the officer's technical competence, but also his or her ability to lead and the ability to gain the trust of subordinates. In a study of volunteer and career firefighters in Kentucky, Fender (2003) found that firefighter willingness to follow orders and to take risks was directly related to the credibility of the officer in charge. "Participants indicated that the principle factor in whether they obeyed the incident commander-even in cases of life or death-was whether they knew the individual and whether they trusted his knowledge, judgment, and expertise" (Fender, 2003, p. 17) . Thus, competence and confidence play a key role in the success or failure of fire-rescue officers.

Leadership Structure

The fire service is a scalar, paramilitary organization where personnel roles are classified by rank. This is very similar to the military services, therefore, leadership development may be similar to leadership development in the fire service. "Military forces excel at complex problem solving in a chaotic environment" (Martin, 2007, p.71). Military organization, command, and control contribute to this ability to mitigate emergencies.

Larrison et al. (2006) noted deficiencies in the research of the development and maturation of junior military officers. They conducted a study of junior military officers from five countries, using interview techniques that allowed the participants to describe their own development as a military officer.

Novice military officers become proficient leaders as they gain confidence and experience in interpersonal relations. Larrison et al. (2006, p. 70),

Consistently across the 5 countries, the core of the process model of leader development is the social interaction between the young officer and his or her significant others (soldiers, peers, and superiors). In the favorable case, officers end this process feeling secure, being able to flexibly adapt their overt behavior on an under-distanced–over-distanced continuum according to situational demands, and have a firm professional identity.

Furthermore, many junior military officers would rather continue to function as experts in their specialty than to focus on broader leadership development. “We’re mission oriented: each of us would rather be flying or doing our particular specialty. In the same way, we have low tolerance for what we perceive to be excessive or needless paperwork or anything else that appears to be unessential to the mission.” (Hall, 2001, p. 82) Derven (2009, p. 50) agrees that “newly promoted supervisors are often promoted based on technical competence,”

and “often default to past areas of strength.” Junior fire officers often would rather perform the technical duties of their previous role rather than their current role.

Fire service leaders also struggle during the transition from ‘buddy to boss.’ New officers will often be “tested” by their subordinates in “at least four ways: station procedures and informal policy, formal policy, as well as your interpretation and enforcement, response guidelines and expectations, and past supervisor actions” (Sargent, 2006, p. 99).

Business and industry leadership principles also apply to fire-service leadership development. Derven (2009) noted several negative results of poorly prepared, new supervisors including “micromanagement, de-motivating direct reports, acting as a bottleneck in workflow, decreasing productivity, and failing to develop employees to their full potential” (p. 51). She advocates for new supervisor training in three distinct areas-organizational, analytical, and interpersonal leadership.

Subordinate and Self-Survey Research

In this study, firefighters and company officers will participate in survey research that will compare company officer performance to standards as described by NFPA 1021. Fleenor, McCauley, and Brutus (1996) studied the relationship between self and subordinate ratings of leadership effectiveness. They noted that “there is some evidence that individuals who provide self ratings that are in agreement with those of subordinates may be more effective leaders than those that supply inflated ratings” (p. 490). They cited Attwater and Sammarion’s (in

press) findings that “self-aware individuals have the ability to use others’ perception of them to make more congruent self ratings, and to modify their behavior based on this information” (p. 491). Thus, these leaders can improve their performance as the result of subordinate feedback.

Summary

The transition from firefighter to company officer brings with it a host of new responsibilities, chief of which is the responsibility for the safety of subordinates. In addition to operational leadership challenges, fire officers face the same administrative and organizational leadership challenges as junior military officers, and front-line supervisors in business and industry. Unfortunately, selection of new, front-line supervisors is often based on past performance in technical or specialty areas, which do not predict success as a leader. Furthermore, often minimal formal training for new leaders is provided by employers.

Self and subordinate surveys can be a useful tool to measure leader performance. Information gathered from these surveys may be used to identify leadership weaknesses and to improve leader performance. Chapter III will describe the methods and procedures that were used to gather, tabulate, organize, and analyze the data. The survey instrument is discussed as well as the population characteristics of the respondents and the statistical analysis that was utilized.

CHAPTER III

Methods and Procedures

The major purpose of this research was to determine the perception of the abilities of company officers of Norfolk Fire-Rescue as defined by the National Fire Protection Association Standard 1021, Standard for Fire Officer Professional Qualifications at the Fire Officer I level. This chapter describes the methods and procedures used to gather information needed to conduct this study. Details of the population studied and instrument used to gather data were discussed. This chapter also describes an explanation of data collection procedures and statistical analysis.

Population

The population for this study consisted of 20 firefighters and 11 company officers of Norfolk Fire-Rescue. Participants ranged in age from 21 to 60 years old. The personnel who were surveyed were represented each of the 3 platoons and 3 battalions in the Operations Division of the department.

Instrument Design

The problem of the study was to determine the perception of the abilities of Norfolk Fire-Rescue Company Officers as observed by peers and subordinates. A questionnaire was developed to survey 31 Norfolk Fire-Rescue personnel.

Questions 1 and 2 were used to establish the rank and tenure of the respondents respectively. This information will be used to compare responses based on these classifications.

Based upon the research goals Questions 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 are based upon the Human Resources Management, Community and Governmental Relations, Administration, Fire Prevention and Enforcement, Emergency Services Delivery, and Health and Safety sections of the Fire Officer I sections of National Fire Protection Association Standard 1021. Respondents were asked to rate their responses to the statements presented by indicating their responses on a Likert-style scale. Choices of strongly disagree, disagree, unsure, agree, and strongly agree were offered. Points were assigned to score each response, with 5 representing strongly agree through 1 as a representation of strongly disagree.

Question 9 was developed to enable the respondents to identify challenges to newly promoted company officers and will help to identify areas of ability that the respondent feels may not be addressed by the survey questions. Additionally, an area was provided after each question for the respondent comments.

The survey was pilot tested by experienced members Norfolk Fire-Rescue. These experienced fire officers, firefighters, and trainers tested the questionnaire items for validity. See Appendix A for a copy of the survey.

Methods of Data Collection

Survey research was conducted to measure the perceptions of company officers and firefighters of the abilities of Norfolk Fire-Rescue company officers as described by National Fire Protection Standard. The researcher sent a link to an electronic survey created with the SurveyMonkey® questionnaire software with a cover letter to the respondents on May 15, 2010, via the City of Norfolk employee electronic mail system.

The cover letter explained the importance of the research and advised the respondent that participation was voluntary. See Appendix B for a copy of the cover letter.

Additionally, respondents were advised that confidentiality would be guaranteed. Respondents were asked to complete the questionnaires by June 15, 2010. Response rates were improved through follow-up electronic mail.

Statistical Analysis

Upon receipt of the survey information, the researcher used descriptive statistical methods to interpret the collected data. The number of responses, frequency of answers, and means were used to statistically analyze the data.

Responses to Question 9 were listed and classified by type and frequency. Comments made following Questions 3 through 8 were recorded and analyzed.

Summary

Chapter III provided information about methods of data collection and the statistical analysis of the data that were gathered. Respondents were asked to answer nine questions which were related to the research questions. Information was gathered regarding the respondents rank and tenure, and perceptions of company officer abilities based on National Fire Protection Standard 1021 for Fire Officer 1 were ranked and scored using a Likert-type scale.

Findings of this research were presented in Chapter IV. Scored responses were analyzed statistically, categorized, and compared based on rank and tenure. Responses to

survey Question 9 were categorized and frequencies of responses were analyzed statistically. Finally, comments made by respondents were reported.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This chapter presented an analysis of the data collected from the questionnaire that was sent using SurveyMonkey® software. This survey was designed to measure respondent attitudes and perception of the leadership abilities of Company Officers employed by Norfolk Fire-Rescue. Subsections were established to report response rate, respondent rank, and tenure. Responses to survey questions were grouped according to their relationship to the research questions. The problem of the study was to compare the perception of Norfolk Fire-Rescue firefighters, Lieutenants, and Captains of the level of competency of Norfolk Fire-Rescue company officers as prescribed by NFPA Standard 1021.

Response Rate

Questionnaires were sent via electronic mail to 31 respondents on June 2, 2010. A follow-up email was sent on June 9, 2010, to improve the response rate. Twenty surveys were sent to firefighters, and 14 were completed, for a response rate of 70%. Eleven surveys were sent to company officers, with 9 returned, for a response rate of 81%. The overall response rate was 74%. Table 1 shows the response rate for firefighters, Table 2 displays the response rate for company officers, and Table 3 displays the overall response rate.

Table 1

Firefighter Response Rate

Number Sent	Number Collected	Response Rate
20	14	70%

Table 2

Company Officer Response Rate

Number Sent	Number Collected	Response Rate
11	9	81%

Table 3

Overall Response Rate

Number Sent	Number Collected	Response Rate
31	23	74%

Tenure

The tenure of respondents ranged in years from 1 year of service to over 21 years of service. The majority of respondents (52.2%) reported 11-15 years of experience.

Table 4 displays the tenure of respondents to the questionnaire.

Table 4

Tenure

Years	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
1-5	2	8.7%
6-10	4	17.4
11-15	12	52.2%
16-20	3	13.0%
21+	2	8.7%

Report of Survey Findings

The findings of the questionnaire are reported and organized according to the related research questions. A narrative description of the results for each questionnaire item was provided. The 74% overall response rate, 81% response rate for company officers and 70% response rate for firefighters was deemed sufficient to represent the larger population of employees of Norfolk Fire-Rescue.

Perception of the Qualifications of Company Officers

Research Question 1 was *Are there differences between the perception of firefighters and company officers of the qualifications of current company officers as described by NFPA 1021?* Research Question 2 was *Do firefighters perceive officers as qualified leaders?* Research Question 3 was *Do company officers perceive themselves to be qualified leaders.* Survey Questions 3 through 10 were designed to answer these questions. Respondents were asked to rate their perceptions by indicating choices of strongly disagree, disagree, unsure, agree, or strongly agree in Question 3 through 8. Space was provided in each item for candidate comments. In Questions 9 and 10, respondents were asked to describe additional leadership needs for new company officers and to provide additional comments, respectively.

In Question 3, respondents were asked to rate their perception of the statement that *company officers are skilled at managing human resources tasks including: assigning and prioritizing emergency and non-emergency duties, writing performance evaluations and developing performance improvement plans, planning training evolutions, and recommending action for member-related problems.* Fifty percent of firefighters and 44% of company officers agreed with this statement, while 29% of firefighters were unsure. Fifty-six percent of company officers disagreed with this statement, and 21% of firefighters either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Table 5 displays the results for Question 3. Two respondents commented that officers needed to attend formal training in this subject. The mean response for firefighters was 3.2, and the mean response for officers was 2.8. The overall mean response was calculated at 3.0 which indicated that respondents were uncertain.

Table 5

Q#3-Human Resources Management Abilities

Statement (abbreviated) Company Officers are skilled at managing human resources tasks.

Response	<i>f-FF</i>	<i>f-CO</i>	<i>%-FF</i>	<i>%-CO</i>
Strongly Agree	0	0	0%	0%
Agree	7	4	50%	44%
Unsure	4	0	29%	0%
Disagree	2	5	14%	56%
Strongly Disagree	1	0	7%	0%

Note. f=frequency of response, FF=Firefighter responses, CO=Company Officer Responses. Percentages are rounded two decimal points.

Question 4 asked the respondents to evaluate their perception of the statement that *Company officers are well prepared to interact accurately and courteously with the public and with other government officials. They are capable of communicating the role, image and mission of the department and can deliver fire safety, injury and fire prevention education programs.* Eighty-five percent of firefighters agree or strongly agree with this statement, while 78% of officers agree with this statement. Fourteen percent of firefighters and 22% of officers are unsure or disagree with this statement. The

results of Question 4 are displayed in Table 6. The mean response for firefighters was 4, and 3.6 for company officers. The overall mean score was 3.87, indicating agreement with the statement.

Table 6

Q#4-Community and Governmental Relations Abilities

Statement (abbreviated): Company Officers are effective communicators.

Response	<i>f</i>-FF	<i>f</i>-CO	%-FF	%-CO
Strongly Agree	3	0	21%	0%
Agree	9	7	64%	78%
Unsure	1	1	7%	11%
Disagree	1	1	7%	11%
Strongly Disagree	0	0	0%	0%

Respondents were asked to evaluate the statement *Company officers are proficient in general administrative duties, including report writing, preparing budgetary requests, maintaining records, explaining new policies to subordinates and recommending changes to existing policies* in Question 5. Fourteen percent of firefighters strongly agreed with this statement. Twenty-nine percent of firefighters and

33% of company officers agreed with this statement. 36% of firefighters and 33% percent of officers were unsure. Twenty-one percent of firefighters and 33% of officers either disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. The mean response for firefighters was 3.2, officers 2.8, and the overall response was 3.13, indicating that most employees were unsure. The responses to Question 5 are displayed in Table 7.

Table 7

Q#5-Administrative Abilities

Statement(abbreviated): Company Officers are proficient in administrative tasks.

Response	<i>f-FF</i>	<i>f-CO</i>	<i>%-FF</i>	<i>%-CO</i>
Strongly Agree	2	0	14%	0%
Agree	4	3	29%	33%
Unsure	5	3	36%	33%
Disagree	2	2	14%	22%
Strongly Disagree	1	1	7%	11%

Respondents were asked to evaluate the following statement in Question 6:

Company officers are well prepared to conduct fire inspections and to develop pre-incident plans for all types of occupancies. They understand fire behavior, building

construction, and alarm and suppression systems. Additionally, company officers are skilled at determining the preliminary cause of a fire, securing the incident scene and preserving evidence. Seventy-one percent of firefighters and 55% of company officers agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. Fourteen percent of firefighters and 11% of officers were unsure, while 14% of firefighters and 33% of officers disagreed with this statement. The mean response for firefighters was 3.64, and the mean for company officers was 3.33. Overall, the mean of responses was 3.52, indicating agreement with this statement. A comment received for Question 6 stated that “little guidance was given to officers” in this area. The results for Question 6 are displayed in Table 8.

Table 8

Q#6-Fire prevention and Enforcement abilities

Statement(abbreviated): Company Officers are proficient in fire prevention and fire cause determination activities.

Response	<i>f-FF</i>	<i>f-CO</i>	<i>%-FF</i>	<i>%-CO</i>
Strongly Agree	1	1	7%	11%
Agree	9	4	64%	44%
Unsure	2	1	14%	11%
Disagree	2	3	14%	33%
Strongly	0	0	0%	0%

Disagree

In Question 7, respondents were asked to evaluate the statement *Company officers are skilled at managing personnel and resources at an emergency scene. They are capable of analyzing an emergency scene and in the development of an incident action plan and implementation of the incident management system. They are capable of deploying resources effectively to mitigate an incident safely while supervising and accounting for assigned personnel under emergency conditions.* Seventy-three percent of firefighters agree or strongly agree with the statement. One hundred percent of company officers reported that they believe that they manage emergency incidents effectively. Seven percent of firefighters were unsure, and 21% either disagree or strongly disagree with the statement. The mean response for firefighters was 3.5. Company officers had an average score of 4.0, and the overall mean was 3.69, indicating agreement with this statement. One company officer commented that “we do a pretty good job, but could use more incident command training.” Answers to Question 7 are summarized in Table 9.

Table 9

Q#7-Emergency Services Delivery abilities

Statement (abbreviated): Company Officers are proficient in managing personnel and resources at an emergency incident scene.

Response	<i>f-FF</i>	<i>f-CO</i>	<i>%-FF</i>	<i>%-CO</i>
Strongly Agree	1	0	7%	0%
Agree	9	9	64%	100%
Unsure	1	0	7%	0%
Disagree	2	0	14%	0%
Strongly Disagree	1	0	7%	0%

Question 8 required the respondent to evaluate the statement that *Company officers foster a safety-conscious environment during both emergency and non-emergency events. They ensure that basic workplace safety policies are followed including the donning of appropriate levels of personal protective equipment, identifying hazards, and protection from infectious disease. They also communicate the importance of personal health and fitness to mission effectiveness to subordinates.*

Eighty-five percent of firefighters and 78% of company officers agree or strongly agree with the statement. Seven percent of firefighters and 11% of officers are unsure. Seven percent of firefighters disagree with the statement, while 11% of officers strongly disagree with the statement. The mean response for firefighters was 4, and officers 3.77.

The mean for all employees was 3.91 indicating agreement with the statement. Responses to Question 8 are summarized in Table 10.

Table 10

Q#8- *Health and Safety Promotion abilities*

Statement (abbreviated): Company Officers promote safety in the workplace.

Response	<i>f</i>-FF	<i>f</i>-CO	%-FF	%-CO
Strongly Agree	3	2	21%	22%
Agree	9	5	64%	56%
Unsure	1	1	7%	11%
Disagree	1	0	7%	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	1	0%	11%

Question 9 asked the respondents to list three or four responsibilities that were challenging to new company officers. These responses were summarized in Table 11.

Table 11

Q# 9- *Challenges to New Company Officers*

Clustered Response	Firefighter responses	Officer responses
Administrative Duties	3	3

Adjustment to Leadership Role	14	6
Training Responsibilities	1	2
Discipline of Subordinates	1	2
Policy Awareness	3	1
Emergency Scene Management	4	1
Safety Promotion		1

In Question 10, respondents were asked to offer additional comments regarding officer development. The five firefighter responses each recommended formal officer preparation classes or a program for new officer development. The four officers who replied also recommended formal leadership development training for new officers.

Tenure and Perception of Company Officer Qualifications

Research Question 4 was *Does tenure of service of the respondents affect perception?* Survey Questions 3 through 10 were designed to answer these questions. Respondents were asked to rate their perceptions by indicating choices of strongly disagree, disagree, unsure, agree, or strongly agree in Question 3 through 8. Space was provided in each item for candidate comments. In Questions 9 and 10, respondents were

asked to describe additional leadership needs for new company officers and to provide additional comments, respectively.

In Question 3, respondents were asked to rate their perception of the statement that *company officers are skilled at managing human resources tasks including: assigning and prioritizing emergency and non-emergency duties, writing performance evaluations and developing performance improvement plans, planning training evolutions, and recommending action for member-related problems*. Members with less than 10 years were more likely to disagree with this statement, while more senior members were likely to agree. Table 12 displays the responses to Question 3.

Table 12

Q #3- Human Resources Management Abilities

Statement (abbreviated): Company Officers are skilled at managing human resources tasks.

Response	1-5 years		6-10 years		11-15 years		16-20 years		21+ years	
Strongly Agree										
Agree	1	50%	1	25%	5	42%	2	67%	2	100%
Unsure			1	25%	2	17%	1	33%		
Disagree	1	50%	2	50%	4	33%				

Strongly Disagree			1	8%		
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Note. f=frequency of response, FF=Firefighter responses, CO=Company Officer Responses. Percentages are rounded two decimal points.

Question 4 asked the respondents to evaluate their perception of the statement that *Company officers are well prepared to interact accurately and courteously with the public and with other government officials. They are capable of communicating the role, image and mission of the department and can deliver fire safety, injury and fire prevention education programs.* The majority of all respondents reported that they agreed with this statement. The responses to Question 4 are displayed in Table 13.

Table 13

Q#4-Community and Governmental Relations Abilities

Statement (abbreviated): Company Officers are effective communicators.

Response	1-5 years		6-10 years		11-15 years		16-20 years		21+ years	
Strongly Agree			1	25%	2	17%				
Agree	2	100%	2	50%	7	58%	3	100%	2	100%
Unsure			1	25%	1	8%				

Disagree			2	17%		
Strongly Disagree						

Respondents were asked to evaluate the statement *Company officers are proficient in general administrative duties, including report writing, preparing budgetary requests, maintaining records, explaining new policies to subordinates and recommending changes to existing policies* in Question 5. Members with 10 years of service or less were more likely to respond as unsure or to disagree with the statement than members with more tenure. The responses to Question 5 are reported in Table 14.

Table 14

Q#5-Administrative Abilities

Statement (abbreviated): Company Officers are proficient in administrative tasks.

Response	1-5 years		6-10 years		11-15 years		16-20 years		21+ years	
Strongly Agree			1	25%	1	8%				
Agree					6	50%			1	50%
Unsure	1	50%	1	25%	2	17%	2	67%	1	50%

Disagree	1	50%	2	50%	1	8%	1	33%	
Strongly Disagree					2	17%			

Respondents were asked to evaluate the following statement in Question 6:

Company officers are well prepared to conduct fire inspections and to develop pre-incident plans for all types of occupancies. They understand fire behavior, building construction, alarm and suppression systems. Additionally, company officers are skilled at determining the preliminary cause of a fire, securing the incident scene and preserving evidence. Members with 5 years or less, and with over 21 years agreed with this statement. Forty-two percent of respondents with 11-15 years of service agreed with this statement, while 33% disagreed. Members with 16-20 years of service agreed with this statement 67%. Responses to Question 6 are displayed in Table 15.

Table 15

Q#6-Fire prevention and Enforcement abilities

Statement (abbreviated): Company Officers are proficient in fire prevention and fire cause determination activities.

Response	1-5 years	6-10 years	11-15 years	16-20 years	21+ years
Strongly Agree			2	17%	

Agree	2	100%	2	50%	5	42%	2	67%	2	100%
Unsure			1	25%	1	8%	1	33%		
Disagree			1	25%	4	33%				
Strongly Disagree										

In Question 7, respondents were asked to evaluate the statement *Company officers are skilled at managing personnel and resources at an emergency scene. They are capable of analyzing an emergency scene and in the development of an incident action plan and implementation of the incident management system. They are capable of deploying resources effectively to mitigate an incident safely while supervising and accounting for assigned personnel under emergency conditions.* Eighty-three percent or greater of members with 11 or more years of service reported that they agreed with this statement. One person with less 10 or less years of service disagreed with this statement.

Results for Question 7 are reported in Table 16.

Table 16

Q#7-Emergency Services Delivery abilities

Statement (abbreviated): Company Officers are proficient in managing personnel and resources at an emergency incident scene.

Response	1-5 years		6-10 years		11-15 years		16-20 years		21+ years	
Strongly Agree			1	25%						
Agree	1	50%	2	50%	10	83%	3	100%	2	100%
Unsure			1	25%						
Disagree	1	50%			1	8%				
Strongly Disagree					1	8%				

Question 8 required the respondent to evaluate the statement that *Company officers foster a safety-conscious environment during both emergency and non-emergency events. They ensure that basic workplace safety policies are followed including the donning of appropriate levels of personal protective equipment, identifying hazards, and protection from infectious disease.* Members with five years or less, and those with 21 or more years agree with this statement. Fifty percent of members from 6-10 years of service, 8 percent of members with 11-15 years and 67% of members with 16-20 years of service strongly agreed with the statement. One member in the study (6-10 years) disagreed with the statement, and one member with between 11 and 15 years of service strongly disagreed with the statement. Responses to Question 8 are summarized in Table 17.

Table 17

Q#8- Health and Safety Promotion abilities

Statement (abbreviated): Company Officers promote safety in the workplace.

Response	1-5 years		6-10 years		11-15 years		16-20 years		21+ years	
Strongly Agree			2	50%	1	8%	2	67%		
Agree	2	100%			10	83%			2	100%
Unsure			1	25%			1	33%		
Disagree			1	25%						
Strongly Disagree					1	8%				

In Question 9, respondents were asked to identify challenges to new company officers. The majority of responses indicated that adjustment to the leadership role was a significant challenge. Responses to Question 9 are clustered and displayed in Table 18.

In Question 10, respondents were asked to offer additional comments regarding officer development. All of the responses recommended formal classes or a training program for newly promoted company officers.

Table 18

Q#9-Challenges to new company officers.

Clustered Response	1-5 years	6-10 years	11-15 years	16-20 years	21+years
Administrative Duties	1		3		2
Adjustment to Leadership Role		4	8	3	1
Training Responsibilities			3		
Discipline of Subordinates	1		2		
Policy Awareness		1	3		
Emergency Scene Management	1	1	2		1
Safety Promotion			1		

Summary

In this chapter, the researcher reported the data from the responses to the survey of the perceptions of firefighter and company officers of the qualifications of company officers of Norfolk Fire-Rescue. Subsections included response rates and responses to questions organized by their relationship to Research Questions 1-4. Data were collected and tabulated using SurveyMonkey® software.

In Chapter V, *Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations*, the researcher will provide an analysis of the findings of the research study, as well as conclusions to each of the four research questions. Finally, recommendations will be made.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Leadership development programs in the Fire-Service vary greatly by locality. Norfolk Fire-Rescue uses a competitive testing process for promotions to the rank of Fire Lieutenant and Fire Captain. Currently, no further formal leadership development is required by or offered to these new company officers. This research study was designed to determine the perceptions of firefighters and company officers of the competency of current company officers based on the NFPA 1021 Fire Officer 1 Standard. In this chapter summary, conclusions, and recommendations will be made.

Summary

The problem of the study was to determine the perception of firefighters and company officers of the qualifications of company officers of Norfolk Fire-Rescue. Four research questions were developed to guide the research and to answer the problem of the study.

RQ 1: Are there difference between the perception of firefighters and company officers of the qualifications of current company officers as described by NFPA 1021?

RQ 2: Do firefighters perceive officers as qualified leaders?

RQ 3: Do company officers perceive themselves to be qualified leaders?

RQ 4: Does tenure of service of the respondents affect perception?

This research study was conducted as a first step to assess current training needs for company officers of Norfolk Fire-Rescue. The NFPA 1021 Fire Officer 1 Standard is used as an industry specific reference regarding the necessary qualifications and abilities of company officers in the United States. The researcher felt that this was an appropriate starting point to assess the qualifications of current company officers.

Limitations of the research included the perceptions of the individual respondents. Perceptions may or may not be accurate, and therefore perception may not always indicate a measure of the true qualifications of the individual. Additionally, NFPA 1021 is a national standard that may not reflect all qualifications that are required at the local level for success as a company officer.

A representative sample of 31 Norfolk Fire-Rescue employees were selected randomly to participate in the study. The population of the study was 31 full-time, uniformed employees of Norfolk-Fire Rescue. Twenty of the respondents held the rank of firefighter, while 11 respondents were company officers. The overall response rate was 74%.

A ten item survey was developed to measure the perceptions of the respondents. This survey was sent to 31 participants on June 2, 2010 via electronic mail. A follow-up message was sent on June 9, 2010 in an effort to improve the response rate. Data collection was terminated on June 15, 2010. The survey responses were tabulated using SurveyMonkey® software. The responses were organized by questionnaire item number and the relationship to the four research questions.

Conclusions

This section answered each research question based on the tabulated responses from the survey. The findings may help to guide the development of leadership training programs for company officers.

Research Question 1: Are there differences between the perception of firefighters and company officers of the qualifications of current company officers as described by NFPA 1021? Firefighters and company officers generally agree that company officers are qualified to manage an emergency scene, conduct fire prevention and code enforcement inspections, promote a safe working environment, and interact with community members and other government entities. The mean score for these areas was 3.71, ranging from 3.52 to 3.91 . Perceptions of administrative and human resources management abilities were uncertain, with a combined average score of 3.06.

There were very few strong disagreements with any of the survey item statements. However, firefighters (21%) and company officers (22%) indicated that they strongly perceived company officers to be safety advocates. Additionally, both company officers and firefighters agreed that company officers were qualified to manage emergency incidents. Both firefighters and company officers commented in Question 9 that leadership development training was needed for new company officers.

Research Question 2: Do firefighters perceive officers as qualified leaders? Firefighters agreed or strongly agreed with every survey item statement with the exception of administrative ability. There was mixed perceptions of officer administrative ability with a mean of 3.13. Perception of company officers' qualifications to promote a

safe working environment and to manage an emergency scene received the greatest number of agree or strongly agree ratings with a mean of 3.91.

Research Question 3: Do company officers perceive themselves to be qualified leaders? The researcher discovered that company officers agreed or strongly agreed with each survey item statement except human resources and administrative ability, where responses were mixed. Interestingly, every company officer (100%) reported they are proficient in managing personnel and resources at an emergency scene. The mean score for officers' perception of emergency scene management was 4.0.

Research Question 4: Does tenure of service of the respondents affect perception? The researcher discovered that the tenure of respondents does influence their perception of company officer competency. Members with 11 years or greater indicated they were more likely to agree or strongly agree with survey item statements than more junior personnel. Experience and expertise may influence the ability of respondents to adequately assess the abilities of company officers.

The research appears to indicate that both firefighters and company officers, regardless of tenure, generally perceive that company officers are competent in the conduct of their duties when compare to the NFPA 1021 Fire Officer 1 Standard. Respondents reported the lowest levels of perceived ability for administrative and human resources tasks with a mean of 3.06.

Despite the overall agreement that current company officers are qualified in the performance of their duties, the respondents overwhelmingly recommended formal training programs for company officers.

Recommendations

Perception may or not be an accurate indicator of ability. Therefore, further studies are needed which would measure performance objectively. The findings of this study suggested that firefighters and company officers, newer employees and veterans, generally perceived that company officer possessed the leadership abilities and qualifications to be successful in their role. The study measured the perceptions of ability by peers and subordinates. The data obtained with this research study, combined with performance studies, may identify training needs that will guide the development of formal leadership and management training programs for company officers of Norfolk Fire-Rescue.

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APPENDIX A



The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather feedback from Norfolk Fire-Rescue firefighters and company officers regarding perception of the abilities of Norfolk Fire-Rescue company officers at the Fire Officer I level as defined by the National Fire Protection Association Standard 1021. In cooperation with Old Dominion University, the researchers will hold all responses in strict confidence during this study. The information that you provide will be statistically summarized with other responses from Norfolk Fire-Rescue personnel and will not be attributable to any single individual. Participation in this study is voluntary and the information that you provide will be kept confidential.

Directions: Please darken the circle that indicates your selection or write-in your answer as appropriate.

Some questionnaire item includes an area to provide further comment.

1. Please indicate your current rank.

Firefighter Lieutenant Captain

2. How many years have you been employed with Norfolk Fire-Rescue?

1-5 6-10 11-15 16-20 21+

Please evaluate the following statements.

3. Company officers are skilled at managing human resources tasks including: assigning and prioritizing emergency and non-emergency duties, writing performance evaluations and developing performance improvement plans, planning training evolutions, and recommending action for member-related problems.

Strongly Agree Agree Unsure Disagree Strongly Disagree

Comment _____

4. Company officers are well prepared to interact accurately and courteously with the public and with other government officials. They are capable of communicating the role, image and mission of the department and can deliver fire safety, injury and fire prevention education programs.

Strongly Agree Agree Unsure Disagree Strongly Disagree

Comment _____

5. Company officers are proficient in general administrative duties, including report writing, preparing budgetary requests, maintaining records, explaining new policies to subordinates and recommending changes to existing policies.

0 Strongly Agree 0 Agree 0 Unsure 0 Disagree 0 Strongly Disagree

Comment: _____

6. Company officers are well prepared to conduct fire inspections and to develop pre-incident plans for all types of occupancies. They understand fire behavior, building construction, detection, alarm and suppression systems. Additionally, company officers are skilled at determining the preliminary cause of a fire, securing the incident scene and preserving evidence.

0 Strongly Agree 0 Agree 0 Unsure 0 Disagree 0 Strongly Disagree

Comment: _____

7. Company officers are skilled at managing personnel and resources at an emergency scene. They are capable of analyzing an emergency scene and in the development of an incident action plan and implementation of the incident management system. They are capable in deploying resources effectively to mitigate the incident safely while supervising and accounting for assigned personnel under emergency conditions.

0 Strongly Agree 0 Agree 0 Unsure 0 Disagree 0 Strongly Disagree

Comment: _____

8. Company officers foster a safety-conscious environment during both emergency and non-emergency events. They ensure that basic workplace safety policies are followed including the donning of appropriate levels of person protective equipment, identifying hazards, and protection from infectious disease. They also communicate the importance of personal health and fitness to mission effectiveness to subordinates.

0 Strongly Agree 0 Agree 0 Unsure 0 Disagree 0 Strongly Disagree

Comment: _____

9. The transition from firefighter to company officer can be challenging. Please offer 3 to 4 areas of responsibility or duties that you feel are most challenging to new company officers.

Additional Comments: (Please indicate if you would like to receive a copy of the completed research via email.)

This concludes the questionnaire. Thank you for your participation in this survey.

APPENDIX B

June 2, 2010

Dear survey participant,

The transition from firefighter to company officer brings with it additional responsibilities for the recently promoted employee. These additional responsibilities include a wide spectrum of duties, ranging from routine administrative duties to leading personnel in emergency operations. Unfortunately, information regarding the capabilities of company officers is not readily available. This study is an attempt to gather information regarding the perception of the capabilities of company officers using benchmarks established by the National Fire Protection Association Standard 1021 at the Fire Officer I level.

Participation in this survey is voluntary. By completing this survey, you indicate that you have been informed of the purpose of this survey and your role, and that you consent to participate and to allow us to use your responses in our survey. Information that you provide will be safeguarded for confidentiality and reported only in the aggregate form. This research project has been approved by Chief Wise. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact us. Please accept our personal thank you for taking the time to complete and return this questionnaire. This survey should take approximately ten minutes to complete. Please complete the questionnaire by June 15, 2010 by clicking

this link <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/VKB8PMN> . Your efforts will contribute to the body of knowledge regarding Fire Service leadership development and may influence the development of officer training programs that will improve both firefighter and public safety. Again, thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,

Dr. John M. Ritz, DTE

Paul E. Savage, Jr.

Professor

ODU Graduate Student

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