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The Need for Effective Leadership Training Programs in Maine's Volunteer Fire Services

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The Need for Effective Leadership Training Programs in
Maine's Volunteer Fire Services

A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts in Leadership Studies
University of Southern Maine
Lewiston-Auburn College

By

Daniel Philbrick

October 2010

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Abstract

This study focuses on the need for effective leadership in a rural all-volunteer fire department. The need for effective leadership is critical with today's volunteer service organizations. This study surveyed the viewpoints of current members of volunteer fire organizations in Maine. The results of this study demonstrate a need for effective leadership training for chiefs of all-volunteer departments. The responses and data gathered are intended to serve as the basis for further study to initiate leadership training for leaders of all-volunteer fire departments. A majority of respondents felt mandatory leadership training should be required for anyone assuming the position of chief and would support any such training program. While the majority of respondents felt their current chief was an effective leader, the study recommends several possible future directions to explore this subject further.

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Introduction

According to the U.S. Fire Administration, 86% of the fire departments in the United States are volunteer or mostly volunteer (Federal Emergency Management Agency, 2010).

Considering that 96% of fire departments in Maine are comprised of all or mostly volunteers, it makes sense to argue that the leadership of these organizations is important. According to the 2009 Maine Fire Department Census, 75% of fire departments are listed as all-volunteer, meaning that their members, including chiefs and senior leadership, are volunteers.

The importance of leadership in today's public safety organizations cannot be underestimated. Leaders of these organizations are challenged with the task of providing economical and effective responses as well as education and preventative services. Compounding the situation is that public safety organizations are called upon to perform more and more services.

Understanding the limitations or lack of leadership training within most all-volunteer fire departments in Maine underscores the need to create leadership training programs for chiefs and other senior officers in these types of departments.

Statement of the Problem and Study Limitations

The purpose of this research project is to identify current perceptions of and needs for effective leadership within rural volunteer fire departments. In this instance the focus is on the State of Maine where the researcher has contacts. However, the findings may be relevant to other primarily rural states. Perceptions of effective leadership by volunteers are collected and the need for formal leadership training programs is demonstrated. Currently, Maine has no formal leadership training programs for fire chiefs of all volunteer departments.

The Hypothesis

The hypothesis is that there is a need for leadership training for fire chiefs in Maine's all-volunteer fire departments.

The Importance of the Study

In order for a fire department to function there must be a clear demonstration of some type of leadership. While there have been several studies and small papers done on effective leadership of firefighters, it is important to demonstrate that fire chiefs need leadership training in order to sustain and

motivate volunteers. The present study is intended to serve as a resource for volunteer fire departments and community leaders to help demonstrate that there is a need so that they may develop programs to keep their followers engaged and motivated.

Review of the Literature

As the study of leadership evolves, a growing number of experts in the field of firefighting are now advocating the importance of and need for attention to leadership for their organizations. Increasingly, researchers are examining leadership effectiveness as it relates to organizational performance. Effective leadership is especially relevant with rural "all-volunteer" fire departments, where leaders are usually chosen by the department membership. These decisions do not generally include a formal selection process or a process based on formal leadership training, experience, and background. Yet, effective leadership is vitally important to organizations that rely on volunteer followers to stay active and engaged in their work. If local leadership adopts effective leadership behaviors, they will be in a better position to protect the lives and the property of their community, as well as the lives of their fellow volunteers.

A review of the literature demonstrates what researchers claim today to be effective leadership behaviors. The review also identifies several effective leadership behaviors as well as challenges particular to a crisis environment recognized by the firefighting field.

The concept of leadership can be defined in many ways depending on the context and situation. According to Ralph Stogdill(1974), Professor Emeritus of Psychology at Ohio State University, "...there are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept" (p. 259). Gary Yukl (2002) in his comprehensive study of the leadership of organizations attempted to define leadership as "the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how it can be done effectively, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish the shared objectives" (p. 7).

While there are numerous theories for effective leadership, at least three different approaches are relevant to this study. These are traits, behavioral, and situational/contingency approaches (Kanji & Moura E Sa, 2001). While this researcher does not claim these three approaches to be the only set of identifiers for effective leadership, they do serve as a

starting point for defining and identifying effective leadership in the present study.

The traits approach is one of the earliest theories involving social science research. Using this theory, researchers attempt to find characteristics or particular qualities that are inherent in people so that natural leaders can be recognized (Northouse, 1997). These early attempts failed, but there has been progress in recent years relating effective leaders with their personal attributes as well as research that identifies traits or skills that can be developed. It is important to recognize that many people still believe that some people are natural born leaders and are "destined" to lead.

This leads to the question of whether leadership can be taught. The study of behavioral leadership traits attempts to answer this question. Behavioral theories of leadership look at identifying sets of effective behaviors that, once identified, can be taught to others so that in turn they may become effective leaders. Researchers D. Katz and R. Kahn (1978) conducted research studies at the University of Michigan in the early 1950's on behavioral research and identified two types of leadership behavior. One was identified as employee oriented (leaders whose behavior towards their followers has a strong emphasis on human relations) while the other behavior was

identified as production oriented (leaders whose behavior concentrated on the technical and production aspects of the job). Both types of leadership behavior are found in firefighting leadership. Many firefighting experts who write about fire service leadership are now advocating the need for a more human relations approach or a style that is employee oriented. However, there is still a strong production oriented type of leadership practiced with organizations such as fire departments, where the focus remains primarily on the tasks or training that needs to be done.

A third theory in the study of effective leadership is called the contingency approach. With contingency theories the relationship of a leader's style and their performance is highly variable. "Situational" or contingency approaches look at different variables that various situations may present and the relationship of the leaders' behaviors as well as their outcomes to these situations (Mello, 1999). According to Yukl(2002), contingency theories can be either "descriptive or prescriptive" (p. 17). How a leader behaves from one situation to another is generally regarded as a descriptive contingency, whereas a prescriptive contingency theory refers to the most effective behavior a leader *should* take in a given situation. Using the contingency approach as applied to leadership within the field

of firefighting, a leader's behavior may be described with different types of behavior recognized in various situations. Prescriptive styles of leadership would apply when a chief is in a position to make decisions about a known situation like a fire that involves chemicals or electrical problems. Each situation may be different but there are common or prescribed ways of handling such situations that a chief would use.

Experts within the fire service industry have different views of what behaviors or styles make an effective leader. Ron Coleman (in Waite, 2008), who has served as deputy director for the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection and as the California State Fire Marshal, believes there is no such thing as a "style" of leadership. Instead, Coleman believes that leaders are either effective or ineffective. This researcher believes that such a view is too simplistic and that behaviors and characteristics in leadership must be looked at in order to better understand and then develop more effective leadership within organizations.

Dr. Burton Clark, Management Science Program Chair at the National Fire Academy (NFA), is another firefighting expert who believes that style is not the issue. Clark believes that successful leadership within the fire service comes from inspiring followers (Waite, 2008). This observation reinforces

what others have written about the importance and need for vision or charisma for successful leadership. However, this researcher believes that it takes certain styles of leadership to be able to inspire followers. Therefore, style remains an issue.

Other experts believe that leadership is most effective when it is situational. Chief Jeff Johnson of the Tualatin Valley Fire and Rescue Department in Oregon argues that different situations require different leadership styles (Waite, 2008). Similar thinking concurs with Silverthorne and Wang (2001) who reported, "...the most effective leaders are those capable of using different leadership styles in response to the demands of the situation" (p.410). Both demonstrate a synthesis of the trait approach and contingency approach to leadership. Fire chiefs and senior officers face many different situations ranging from administrative and policy decisions to personnel actions and planning or crisis management. The unpredictable nature of the demands on fire chiefs logically supports the argument for leadership being best when it is situational.

Recently, other models and approaches in the study of effective leadership have been introduced. Instrumental and charismatic leadership are two such models. Instrumental leadership relates to organizational design, control, and reward

which involve managing environments to create conditions that motivate a desired behavior (Kanji & Moura E Sa, 2001).

Instrumental leadership uses teams to form the basis of an integrated system that help to distribute work in organizations (Yukl, 2002).

The need for motivating followers is best demonstrated with the study of charismatic leadership. Charismatic leadership incorporates the use of strong interpersonal skills to envision, empower and energize followers (Eriz et al., 2008). Part of the charismatic process involves energizing and aligning employees who will find ways to implement a shared vision. Both instrumental and charismatic leadership highlight the need for a shared vision and a focus on employees or followers as individuals.

For the most part, the field of fire service still remains a top-down hierarchical form of organization. From the late 1890's until the late 1940's scientific management, a theory that attempted to make management a scientific and rational process, dominated as the leading organizational theory (Yukl, 20002; Haverty, 2003). This management/leadership framework still remains part of the fire service industry. However, a growing number of leaders in the fire service now recognize the

need for additional behavioral approaches to leadership which include setting directions, goals, and visions (Haverty, 2003).

Contemporary leadership scholars agree that the practice of leadership in modern organizations involves vision setting, collaboration and motivation (Bennis, 1989). Many of today's firefighting professionals, who have written about the field of leadership, recognize several common behaviors they believe are critical for leadership within the fire service. These include, but are not limited to, having or developing a vision and motivating followers to adopt that vision, communicating effectively, being trustworthy and honest, and being confident and competent. (Dyar 2000, as cited in Kelly, 2003; Heflin, 2008; Cook, 2001; Shoebridge, 2006; Prziborowski and Piontek, 2008).

What this researcher has found is that fire service leaders must first and foremost have a clear vision for their organization before they can be successful with the other identified effective leadership behaviors.

Vision and Motivation

An effective vision begins with good judgment and motivation or a desire to do something. Research conducted by Bennis and Tichy (2008) demonstrated that effective leadership in crisis situations is all about good judgment (p. 3). According to

their research, leadership during crisis situations involves three phases: a preparation phase, a call phase, and an execution phase (Bennis & Tichy, 2008, p.3). Leadership fails during crisis situations because there is no clear prepared vision for the organization. To handle these situations effectively leaders must have their organization aligned along a common vision.

Having a vision for an organization is arguably critical for any effective leader in the fire service. Kanterman (2008) wrote, based on experience and work in the field, that all successful leadership must have a vision. Success in leadership is also measured by creating a workable strategy to achieve a desired outcome (Stoney, 2006). Without a clear vision and strategy for an organization, shared goals and objectives will be unattainable.

A second critical element in effective leadership behavior is the ability to motivate followers. Leaders who successfully motivate the people in their organization are rewarded with satisfied followers. Successful effective leaders must motivate the followers in their organization to commit their energy and resources to the mission and vision of their organization (Weber & Khademian, 2008). In the fire service industry this translates to allowing firefighters to be in control of their position. In

a survey by Thompson and Bono (2003), 90% of the volunteer firefighters indicated that they felt more motivated by "being in control of what we do and how we do it" (p. 330).

Communication & Collaboration

Also important in executing shared visions are collaborating and communicating with followers. The ability to communicate effectively helps to bring a leader's vision to everyone in the organization (Kelly, 2003). "The next generation of leaders will be those who can build a vision based on awareness of economic transformation, then help their partners and staff fulfill that vision," states author Esther Wachs (in Wynn, 2001, p. 19). Even though this statement was made with particular reference to the business world, Kelly (2003) believes that the fire service industry would benefit from the same line of thinking, because as Sargent (2006) writes, people do not follow individuals, rather they follow ideals that are communicated in a way that people feel "they have a stake in the outcome" (p. 54). By communicating effectively and clearly a leader is rewarded with more engaged and motivated followers, which also benefits the organization and its mission. Again, high achievement is clearly valuable in a volunteer firefighting situation and may be achieved with leadership training.

Some fire service experts also write that communication is critical for good leadership (Kanterman 2008). The communication must be consistent and sustained. Today's myriad of communication tools, such as e-mail, chat lists, and social networking sites, provide many different ways to communicate effectively. The effective leader will be able to customize different communications methods to the different types of people that serve in their organization.

Once a vision has been established, it is just as critical to review the vision regularly and monitor it for adjustments. This is where collaboration and communication become critical. The frequency of review may vary, but effective and efficient organizations that review their organization's vision regularly are often successful (Waite, 2008).

An organization that has clear lines of communication is able to follow a central task or goal and usually performs better (Weber & Khademian, 2008). Part of communicating effectively is to learn to become a good listener. "Leaders who invest the time to listen to the people in their organizations tend to develop strong and lasting relationships" (Simpson, 2006, p. 127). An effective leader does not just dictate from above. They must listen to the needs, concerns and ideas of their

followers and then must incorporate what they hear into their strategy and actions of leadership (p.127).

Finally, leaders with a clear vision who communicate that vision effectively with their organizations create an atmosphere of trust (Zenger et al., 2009). The relationship of organizational leaders with their followers is critical to building that trust.

Being Trustworthy & Honest

A leader who cannot be trusted will never have people follow them or their organization's goals. Research indicates that trust in the leadership of an organization will produce a strong commitment from its followers. For example, Goswick (2007) says good leadership starts with building trust. Sometimes the difference between being a good leader and a great one is the perspective of the followers under that leader and how honest they believe that leader is. If a leader is not honest with their followers they will never be trusted (Prziborowski and Piontek, 2008).

Confidence and Competence

Trust in and loyalty to a leader is also based on respect. Shoebridge (2006) argues that firefighters need to be confident that their leaders are not afraid to carry out orders or rules

at the risk of not being liked. Competency is another key factor.

Kolditz & Brazil (2005) found that in dangerous situations competency is the basis for trust and loyalty in a leader (p. 350). The fire service is an excellent example of where trust in leadership is extremely important. Firefighters need to be confident that their chief is doing the right thing and is leading them competently.

Summary

Innovative fire service leaders who continually seek to maintain a vision for their organization, hold the trust of their followers, and who are competent communicators, will be better prepared to move their organizations forward.

The relevant literature presented in this review is intended to serve as a theoretical basis for the study of effective leadership in a rural all-volunteer fire department. The literature demonstrates that there are theoretical models of leadership that can be applied to fire chiefs. It also demonstrates that there are certain behavioral aspects of leadership that successful fire chiefs can learn and should develop.

Description of Methodology

The present study looks at all-volunteer fire departments in the State of Maine. Surveys were distributed to several communities that were identified as being "all-volunteer" by the 2009 Maine Fire Department census. The results of the survey identify what members of these volunteer fire departments believe leadership is, as well as the importance of effective leadership. It also demonstrates if members believe that their current fire chief is an effective leader based on criteria listed in the survey (a copy of the survey appears in Appendix A).

The survey for this project is based on a prior survey given to volunteer firefighters in Westchester County, New York (Kelly, 2003). That survey was designed to measure effective leadership for fire officers. Its intent was to measure the participant's knowledge or prior thoughts about leadership as well as find out what they thought about current leadership practices within their respective volunteer departments. The results of that survey, which had 300 respondents, indicated that 97% felt leadership skills were necessary for chief officers (Kelly, 2003, p. 23). Respondents of the Westchester

County survey also viewed their current chief officers as leaders (p. 23).

The present study was reviewed and approved by the University of Southern Maine Institutional Review Board. Participation was voluntary and the results remain confidential. Every participant was given a statement of consent with each survey which indicated that they must be 18 years or older. Participants were not asked to identify themselves, their chief or their department. A self-addressed stamped envelope was included with each survey so that participants would be encouraged to return them.

Participants were asked what they believed were the characteristics of effective leadership and if they thought that leadership training was important for a chief to have in order to lead an all volunteer fire department. The survey used several "yes" and "no" type questions to measure the respondents' knowledge and beliefs about current practices within their departments. The survey included an ordinal or rank-order scale to measure the ranking of certain skills and attributes that the participant felt were important for a fire chief to have as well as a Likert scale to measure what each participant thought was important for a fire chief to have as personal characteristics. Participants were asked to not rate

their current chief at first but instead to indicate what they believed was important for any chief to have. Then, based on their ratings, the participants were asked if they thought their current chief had these identified characteristics.

The Likert scale used in this research was also important to demonstrate "trait" vs. "process" leadership. The scale was based on a Leadership Trait Questionnaire (LTQ) by Northouse (2000). The results provided demonstrate how the survey respondents perceived their fire chief as a leader.

One area not measured that may have been insightful was to have the chief also complete this same section to compare their answers with members of their department. However, since departments were not identified for this survey this was impossible. It may be an interesting case study for future research in this area.

Definition of Terms

Fire chief: A fire chief is someone who is hired by the town to oversee all operational, budgetary, and personnel aspects of the town's fire department. Some towns also have assistant chiefs, but for the purpose of this study only the position of chief will be examined. A chief usually reports to the town's council or select board and in the cases of all volunteer departments may be the only member who receives a regular salary.

Firefighter: A firefighter is a member of a town's fire department who helps with extinguishing fires, responds to rescue calls, performs service calls, and may participate in civic ceremonies or duties in the capacity of representing the fire department. Some firefighters are salaried and may or may not be officially organized in a labor union. Other firefighters, like those in this study, are volunteers and may or may not receive compensation for responding to calls or may be reimbursed for travel, training, and equipment expenses.

Volunteer Fire Department/Company: A fire department whose membership is made up completely of volunteer firefighters (not paid employees) with the exception of the fire chief, who may be employed by the city or town.

Data Analysis

One hundred surveys were mailed to various all-volunteer fire departments in Maine. The departments were chosen by this researcher using listings from the 2009 Maine Fire Census. Departments with larger memberships were chosen in the hopes of increasing the amount of participation. Surveys were also distributed to various areas of the State to prevent skewing of the data from a particular geographic area being singled out. The researcher received 27 completed surveys or 27% of the total surveys distributed.

Part A of the survey was intended to gauge the respondents' knowledge about leadership and asked several questions that referred to common myths that usually surround leadership (Ward, 2001). The results are shown in Tables I - IV.

Table I

Leadership and management are one and the same		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
True	30%	8
False	70%	19
<i>answered question</i>		27
<i>skipped question</i>		0

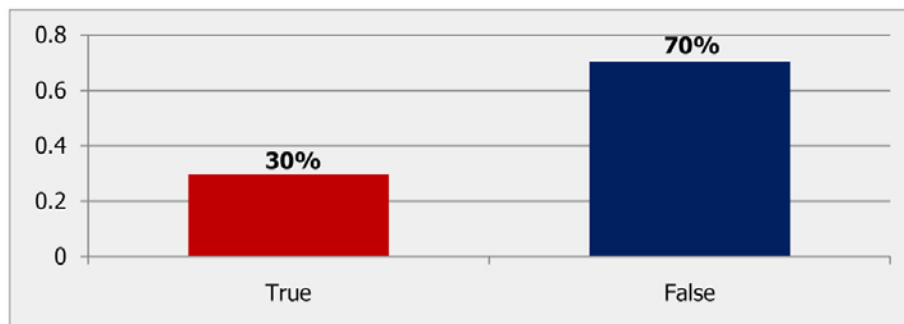


Table II

Leaders are born, not made		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
True	22%	6
False	78%	21
<i>answered question</i>		27
<i>skipped question</i>		0

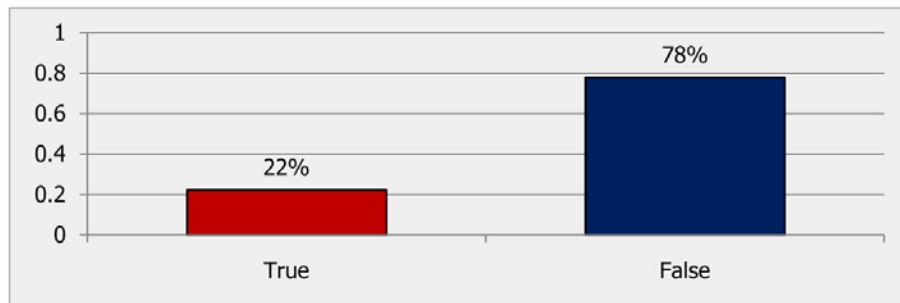
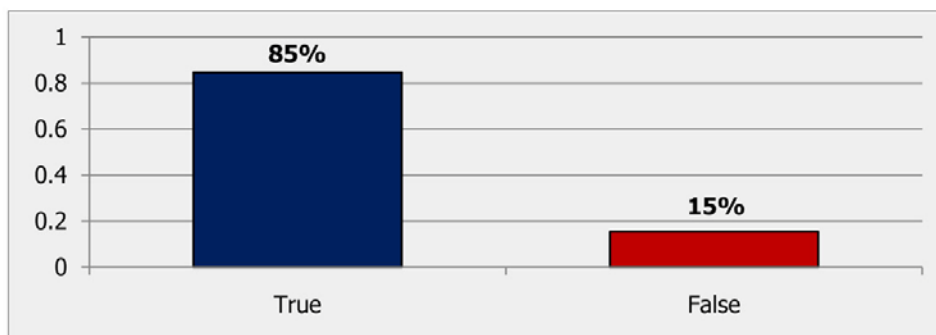


Table III

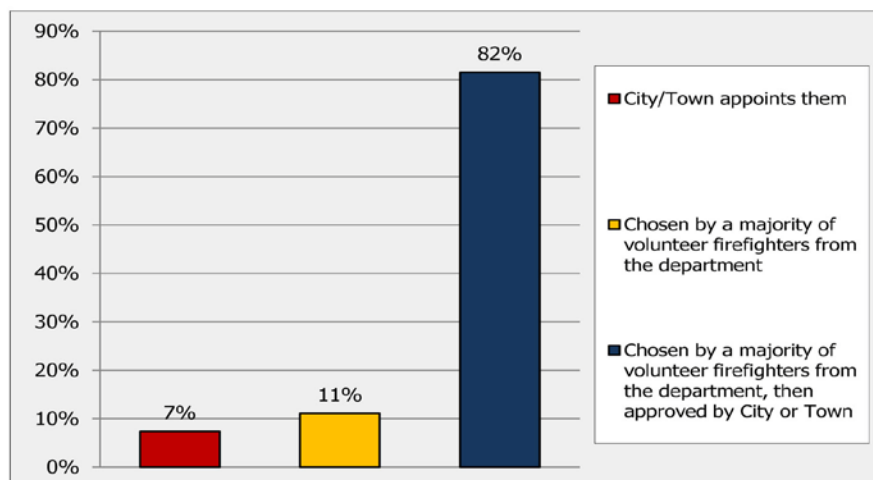
Effective leaders may also be friends with the people they lead		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
True	84.6%	22
False	15.4%	4
<i>answered question</i>		26
<i>skipped question</i>		1



The results of Part A of the survey demonstrate that the majority of the respondents who answered the survey seem to understand what leadership is and do not believe in many of the common misunderstandings surrounding leadership (Ward, 2001). This researcher was particularly pleased with the results from question 1, which asked if "leadership and management are one in the same." Seventy percent of the respondents thought that this was false, lending greater strength to the subsequent questions in the survey about the importance of leadership development for fire chiefs. An even larger majority (85%) believed that leaders could also be friends with those they lead.

Table IV

How is the Chief of your department chosen for the position?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
City/Town appoints them	7%	2
Chosen by a majority of volunteer firefighters from the	11%	3
Chosen by a majority of volunteer firefighters from the	82%	22
Other (please describe)	0.0%	0
<i>answered question</i>		27
<i>skipped question</i>		0

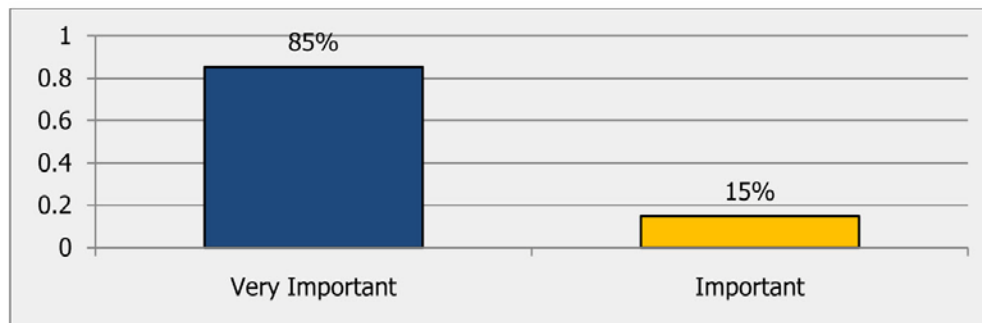


The majority of survey respondents (82%) were from volunteer fire departments that indicated their fire chief is chosen by a majority of volunteer firefighters and then is approved by the city or town government. This indicated or confirmed the type of respondents sought for this survey. The researcher wanted subjects who had an active role in choosing their leadership. The next highest type of respondent was from a department where the chief is chosen by members of the volunteer department without town approval. This type of respondent was also suitable for the research project,^{32a} because again,^{32b} the researcher wanted respondents who had been actively involved in choosing their leadership. Only two respondents indicated that the town or city appoints their chief without any participation by members of the department. This response may have been chosen by those not familiar with the process or may have been selected by error since the researcher actively chose departments where the volunteers responding to the survey played a key role in selecting their leadership. Either way, the number of respondents who selected the latter method was not enough to significantly alter what the researcher was striving for. By establishing that the majority of respondents had a similar process in selecting their chief, the researcher was able to establish that the subsequent questions answered were from

volunteer departments that selected their chiefs in the same way.

Table V

How important are leadership skills for Chiefs of volunteer fire departments?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Very Important	85%	23
Important	15%	4
Slightly Important	0.0%	0
Not Important At All	0.0%	0
<i>answered question</i>		27
<i>skipped question</i>		0

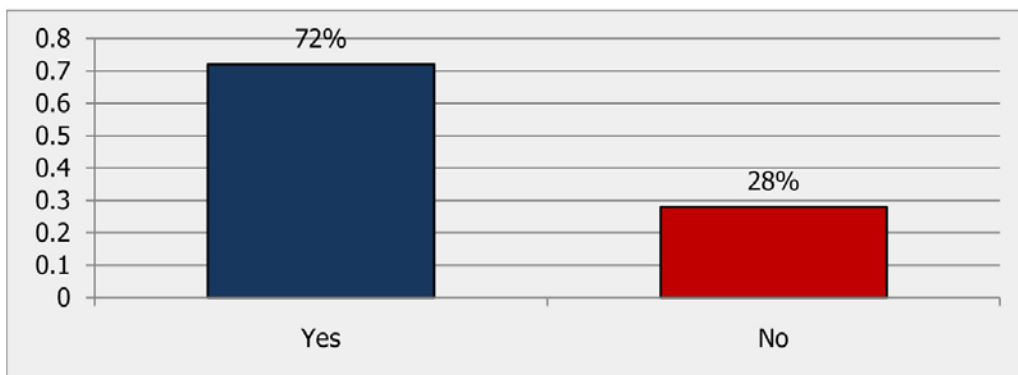


A majority of survey respondents (85%) indicated that they believed leadership skills were very important for chiefs of volunteer fire departments. The remaining respondents (15%) believed that leadership skills were just as important. None of the respondents indicated that leadership skills were only slightly important or not important at all. Again, based on the results from Part A, the respondents seemed to have a basic knowledge of what leadership is vs. myths that surround leadership (leaders are born, not made, etc.). At the very least they seemed to understand there is a difference between

leadership and management. This clearly shows that volunteers believe that leadership skills for chiefs are taken seriously and are viewed as necessary.

Table VI

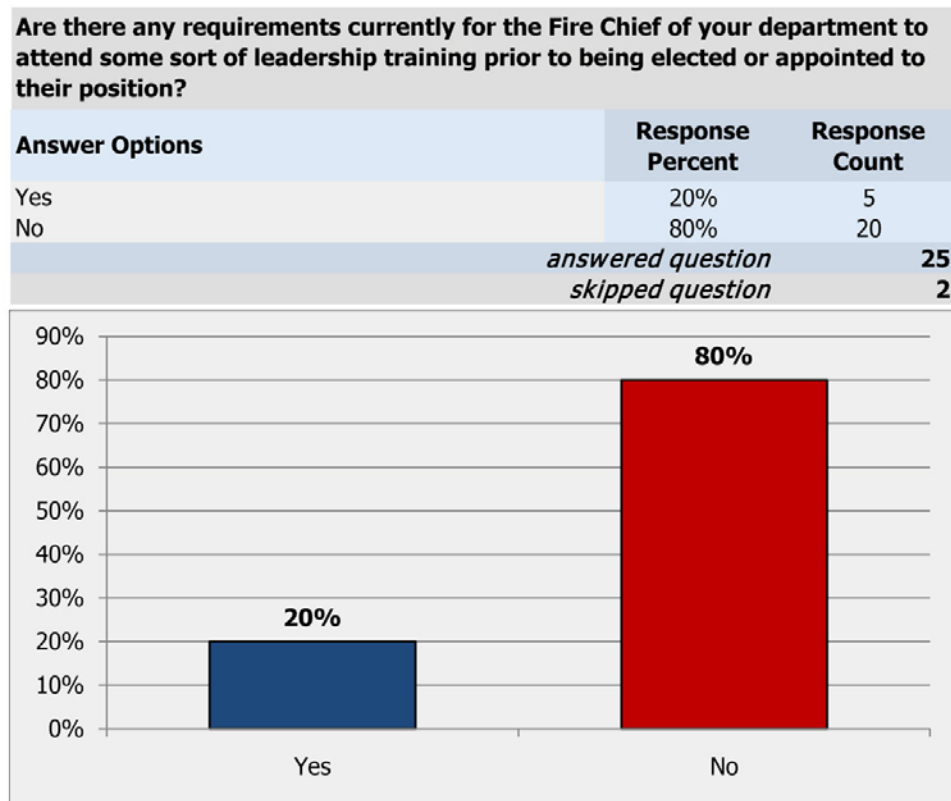
Do you feel that leadership training should be required to assume a position as Chief in your volunteer department?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	72%	18
No	28%	7
<i>answered question</i>		25
<i>skipped question</i>		2



The question in Table VI asked survey participants if they believed that leadership training should be required to assume a position as chief in their volunteer department. While a strong majority of respondents indicated yes (72%), there seemed to be more dispersion with this question as 28% of the respondents did not seem to think this was important, and two respondents skipped the question entirely making the researcher wonder if respondents were not sure if they could commit to a policy where some form of leadership development was required. This is

something to look closely at if a future project attempts to study mandatory leadership training for chiefs of all-volunteer fire departments.

Table VII

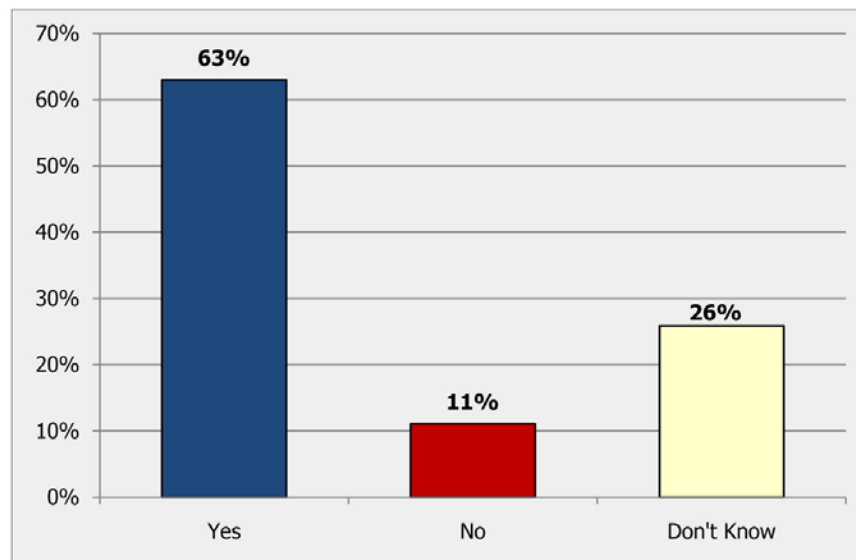


The results in Table VII are very telling. The survey asked participants if there were any leadership training requirements currently in place for chiefs to attend prior to being appointed or elected. Eighty percent indicated that there were none, while just 20% thought there were. Two participants skipped the question entirely which possibly may mean that they were not

aware of any programs or policies in place or did not understand the question. The results of this question clearly show that people may become a fire chief of an all-volunteer fire department without taking any formal leadership skills classes.

Table VIII

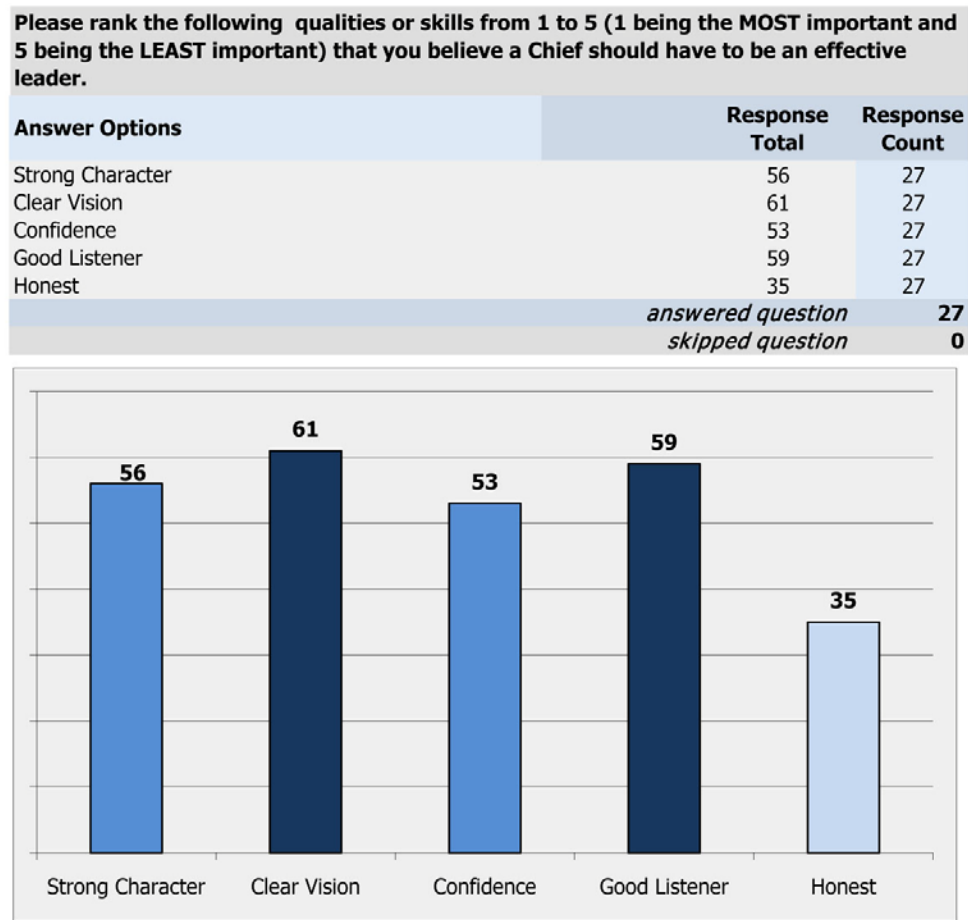
Do you believe that current volunteers in your department would support a mandatory training or educational leadership program for those who wish to become the Chief?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	63%	17
No	11%	3
Don't Know	26%	7
<i>answered question</i>		27
<i>skipped question</i>		0



Interestingly, although 70% of the respondents responded positively to the question of whether there "should" be leadership training, only 63% agreed that it should be mandatory. The results from the latter question may reflect a slight aversion of a "mandatory" process or program. While the

majority of the respondents did believe they would be able to support a mandatory training or educational leadership program, when you add together the respondents who answered "no" with those who "did not know" the consensus is not as clearly defined as in previous statements. This may be because respondents were unsure of what type of mandatory program the question was referring to. Some may have been thinking a week long seminar while others thought months of training. Some may believe that anytime the word "mandatory" is mentioned with members of volunteer organizations there is usually hesitation since time and commitment are issues. Another possibility is that "mandatory" sounds too strong, as many people balk when they "have" to do something.

Table IX



The characteristics used for this question had been identified in the Ward survey as being very important for fire fighter leadership (2001). Not all of the respondents answered this question in the way the researcher had instructed. Several respondents selected the same rank number for each quality or skill (indicating that all five characteristics were equally important) instead of selecting a rank order preference from 1 to 5. It may be that the respondents were not familiar with how rank order questions work, or it may indicate that the

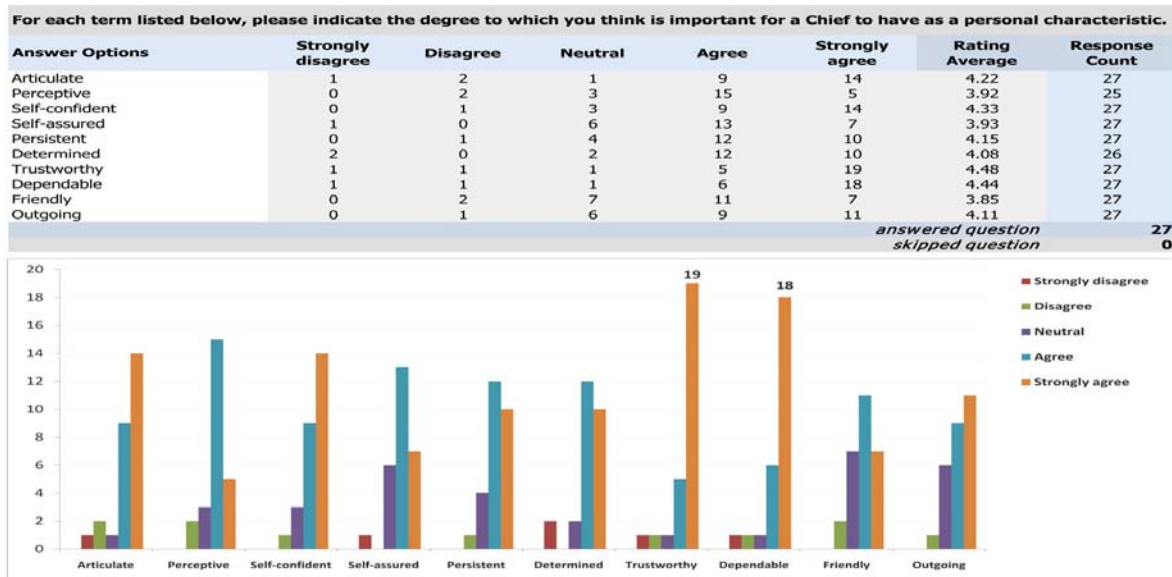
respondents felt their choice was appropriate for all skills and qualities. The results do show that the respondents felt it was slightly more important for a chief to have a clear vision and be a good listener than have confidence or a strong character, although chiefs with strong characters and confidence were the next highest choices in the rankings. Interestingly, honesty scored the lowest as being important with respondents, thus being inconsistent with the prior Ward (year) study.

Unfortunately, it was not possible to calculate percentages of the most important characteristics respondents felt a chief should have since the rank order procedure method was not followed by each respondent. Future surveys using a rank order may benefit by providing an example after the question which clearly shows the respondent what the format or result should look like.

The next question provides a clearer sense of some of the leadership characteristics valued by the volunteers.

Tables Xa and Xb

The first chart graphically shows which characteristics respondents felt were more important. The second chart represents the same data but shows the results in numerical form to demonstrate which answers received a higher percentage.



	Strongly disagree				Strongly agree	Rating Average	Response Count
Articulate - Communicates effectively with others	3.7% (1)	7.4% (2)	3.7% (1)	33.3% (9)	51.9% (14)	4.22	27
Perceptive-Discerning and insightful	0.0% (0)	8.0% (2)	12.0% (3)	60.0% (15)	20.0% (5)	3.92	25
Self-confident-Believes in oneself and one's ability	0.0% (0)	3.7% (1)	11.1% (3)	33.3% (9)	51.9% (14)	4.33	27
Self-assured-Secure with self, free of doubts	3.7% (1)	0.0% (0)	22.2% (6)	48.1% (13)	25.9% (7)	3.93	27
Persistent-Stays fixed on goals, despite interference	0.0% (0)	3.7% (1)	14.8% (4)	44.4% (12)	37.0% (10)	4.15	27
Determined-Takes a firm stand, acts with certainty	7.7% (2)	0.0% (0)	7.7% (2)	46.2% (12)	38.5% (10)	4.08	26
Trustworthy-Acts and words are believable, inspires confidence	3.7% (1)	3.7% (1)	3.7% (1)	18.5% (5)	70.4% (19)	4.48	27
Dependable-Is consistent and reliable	3.7% (1)	3.7% (1)	3.7% (1)	22.2% (6)	66.7% (18)	4.44	27
Friendly-Shows kindness and warmth	0.0% (0)	7.4% (2)	25.9% (7)	40.7% (11)	25.9% (7)	3.85	27
Outgoing-Talks freely, gets along well with others	0.0% (0)	3.7% (1)	22.2% (6)	33.3% (9)	40.7% (11)	4.11	27
<i>answered question</i>							27
<i>skipped question</i>							0

The Likert scale used to measure respondents' opinions produced results that were predictable. The question measured respondents' opinions about what they thought were important for

a fire chief to have as personal characteristics. Respondents were asked to not rate their current chief but instead indicate what they believed was important for any fire chief to have. Most respondents felt the characteristics listed were important for any chief to have. There were some anomalies with the responses. For example, two respondents didn't think taking a firm stand or acting with certainty was important at all for any chief. One respondent strongly disagreed that it was important for a chief to be trustworthy, while another felt being dependable was not important. This may be due to the respondents' unfamiliarity with the scale measurement direction. The respondents who scored these characteristics low may have thought they were scoring high, thinking a "1" on the scale was "strongly agree" instead of "strongly disagree." However, the majority of respondents did strongly agree that the characteristics listed were important for any chief. Being trustworthy and dependable scored the highest as important characteristics (70.4% and 66.7% respectively). These characteristics were selected more by the respondents than any of the other characteristics listed. This is in line with what Stoney (2006) writes that "The first quality of leadership is character" (p. 69). One respondent commented that their chief was not perceived as honest. "He is so willing to avoid

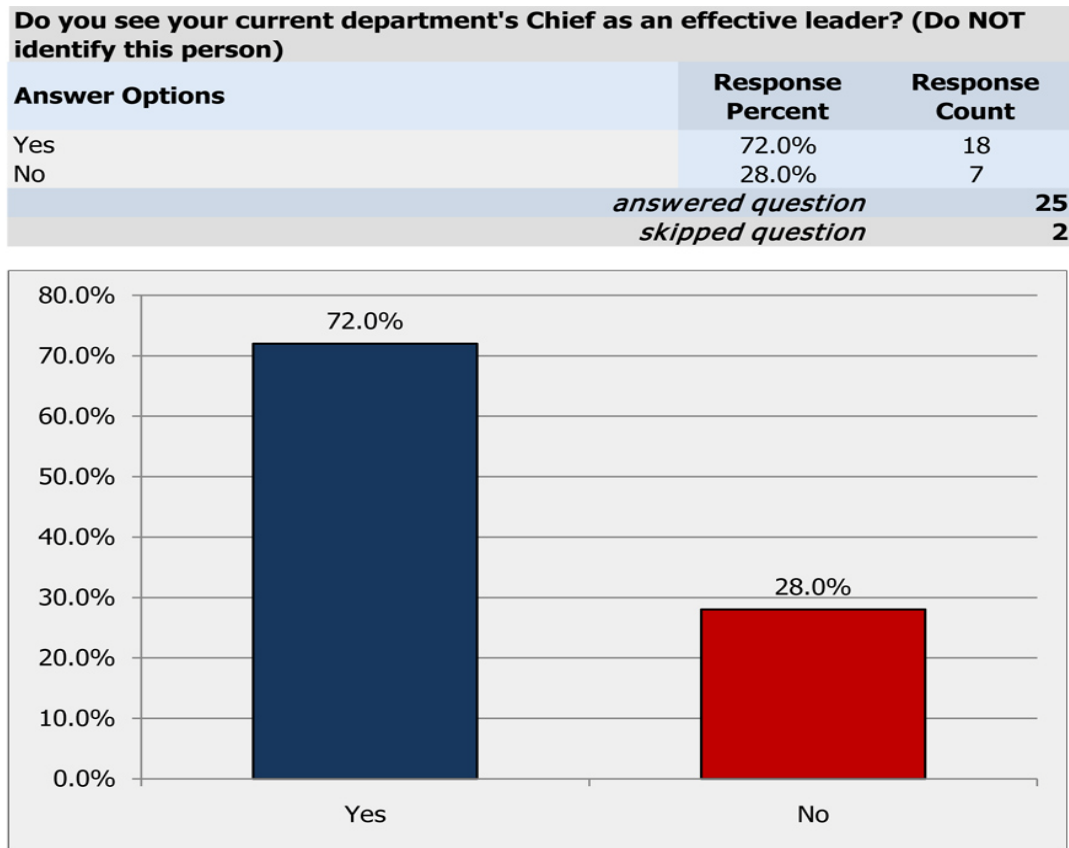
confrontation he will consistently pass the blame to others and lie which makes the entire department self-destructive."

Character clearly is a quality of leadership that followers look for in their leader.

Fifty-two percent of respondents strongly agreed that a chief should be articulate and be able to communicate well. As reviewed above, scholars agree that communication needs to be a cornerstone of good leadership in public safety. Leaders need to keep information flowing to keep their followers engaged and informed. One respondent recognized their chief's communication skills by responding, "He is always willing to help others and clearly explains all directions. He is approachable and friendly."

Sixty percent of respondents also believed that a chief should be perceptive, discerning and insightful. The survey data supports what Kanterman (2008) stresses, in that "if you're going to be a leader in your organization you must have vision" (p.113).

Table XI



It is clear from the results that the majority of survey respondents felt their current chief was an effective leader. This is not surprising considering that 93% (see survey question in Table IV) of the total survey respondents indicated that they select or vote for their chief. Why wouldn't they be supportive? However, the researcher did notice that respondents still favored leadership training. A full 72% of respondents indicated that they thought leadership training *should* be required by chiefs before they assume a leadership position. Additionally,

not all respondents indicated that their current chief is an effective leader. One respondent noted that their chief did not have enough experience with volunteers in the fire service. "He forgets that people have families which comes first [sic] over the fire department." Another responded that their chief gave away too much leadership. "Instead of allowing middle management the ability to exercise some leadership, he has given all of his leadership ability to them, rendering himself ineffective. This has created dissension in the ranks and has created a work environment full of doubt and uncertainty."

Still another indicated that their chief had "little skill with people, had no vision of building a better fire department and was not very truthful," all skills or traits identified in the literature, and in some or most cases by respondents, of an effective leader.

Conclusion

The hypothesis and basis for this study was that there is a need for effective leadership training for chiefs in Maine's all-volunteer fire departments. While the results of the research indicated that current members of all-volunteer fire departments in Maine felt their chiefs were perceived as good leaders (as, in most cases they did have a say in choosing them), it also demonstrated that the majority still believed

some form of leadership training should be required and that the volunteers would support some form of training program. The results also demonstrate several areas that would benefit from additional research.

One area worth exploring further is the relationship of career officers and firefighters working with members of an all-volunteer department. The research for this study came about when the researcher had conversations with full time or career members of fire departments who identified a need for better leadership training for leadership positions with all-volunteer departments. They observed that volunteers, while trained in procedures for fire fighting and rescue, lacked the formal leadership training needed to keep members of an organization engaged and focused on the mission of the department. Further exploration of this relationship may produce a more effective working model where the two types of organizations, volunteer and paid, could work better together.

It should also be noted that the failure to require formal leadership training for leaders of all-volunteer departments is not limited to Maine. Several studies that demonstrate a need for formal leadership training programs have been done throughout the country (Kelly, 2003).

Both the literature and the survey show that quality leadership in public safety organizations draws from at least five different characteristics of roughly equal importance. Leaders of these organizations must be honest in their words and actions, be dependable, communicate clearly, listen well, and have a vision for their organization. All of these skills can be taught and learned in an effective leadership training program.

Recommendations for Future Study

The following recommendations are offered for future research in this area.

1. A similar study should be conducted with a larger sample and/or in another rural state. This study only asked 100 members in one state to participate and achieved a 27% response rate. A larger study which perhaps polls all volunteer members throughout a state may result in different results showing a greater need for leadership training or a wider variety of skills in which leaders should be trained.
2. A study that looks at a qualitative analysis of career (paid) firefighters and their perceptions of interacting with leadership from an all-volunteer department (something which occurs when a larger fire demands that a volunteer company be joined by professionals) may provide even

further insight. Arguably, combining a volunteer and a professional force in the midst of a crisis could require additional leadership skills by the volunteer fire chief.

3. A comparison study of leadership styles between chiefs from an all-volunteer department and chiefs from a full time department may demonstrate different styles and perceptions that may help in planning leadership training programs for volunteer chiefs.

4. Finally, a study or project on creating a leadership training program for chiefs of all-volunteer fire departments would help to establish the necessary training needed to enable these chiefs to become more effective leaders.

Maine, like other rural states, continues to rely heavily on all-volunteer fire companies to keep their communities' property and citizens safe. Understanding effective leadership in the fire service field should continue to be a subject of further research by leadership scholars and those in the field.

It is hoped that this study and perhaps future ones will identify effective leadership behaviors that can be used to develop leadership programs in all-volunteer fire departments and will serve as a model to identify effective leadership when selecting or hiring fire chiefs for small all-volunteer

organizations. Applying these leadership behaviors will greatly improve organizations that rely on volunteers to serve and protect their community in the fire service industry, as well as to help to keep people motivated to serve in the organization under even more skilled leadership. The importance of training the leaders of these organizations therefore should not be underestimated or ignored.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Sample of survey used

Appendix B: Institutional Review Board proposal and approval

Appendix A

Leadership Survey for Fire Chiefs of an All Volunteer Fire Department

The purpose of this survey is to gather data about what volunteer firefighters believe are characteristics of effective leadership. The survey should be completed by volunteer firefighters 18 years or older. **Please do not put your name or other identifiable information on this survey.**

Part A

Please circle what you feel to be the correct answer

1. Leadership and management are one and the same True False
2. Leaders are born, not made True False
3. Effective leaders may also be friends with the people they lead. True False

Part B

How is the Chief of your department chosen for the position? (choose one)

- A. City/Town appoints them
- B. Chosen by a majority of volunteer firefighters from the department
- C. Chosen by a majority of volunteer firefighters from the department, then approved by City or Town
- D. Other (Please describe)

How important are leadership skills for Chiefs of volunteer fire departments? (circle one)

Very Important Important Slightly Important Not Important At All

Do you feel that leadership training should be required to assume a position as Chief in your volunteer department? (circle one) Yes No

Are there any requirements currently for the Fire Chief of your department to attend some sort of leadership training prior to being elected or appointed to their position? (circle one) Yes No

Do you believe that current volunteers in your department would support a mandatory training or educational leadership program for those who wish to become the Chief? (circle one)

Yes No Don't Know

Please rank the following qualities or skills from 1 to 5 (1 being the MOST important and 5 being the LEAST important) that you believe a Chief should have to be an effective leader.

Strong Character ____ Clear Vision ____ Confidence ____ Good Listener ____ Honest ____

For each term listed below, please indicate the degree to which you think is important for a Chief to have as a personal characteristic. Please select one of the following responses to indicate the strength of your opinion. Please don't rate your current Chief. Instead indicate what you BELIEVE is important for any Chief to have.

Key: 5= Strongly agree 4=agree 3= Neutral 2= Disagree 1=Strongly disagree

1. Articulate - Communicates effectively with others	1	2	3	4	5
2. Perceptive-Discerning and insightful	1	2	3	4	5
3. Self-confident- Believes in oneself and one's ability	1	2	3	4	5
4. Self-assured - Secure with self, free of doubts	1	2	3	4	5
5. Persistent - Stays fixed on goals, despite interference	1	2	3	4	5
6. Determined - Takes a firm stand, acts with certainty	1	2	3	4	5
7. Trustworthy - Acts and words are believable, inspires confidence	1	2	3	4	5
8. Dependable - Is consistent and reliable	1	2	3	4	5
9. Friendly - Shows kindness and warmth	1	2	3	4	5
10. Outgoing - Talks freely, gets along well with others	1	2	3	4	5

Do you see your current department's Chief as an effective leader? (Do NOT identify this person)

(select one) Yes No

Please explain why

Thank you for your participation in this survey!

Appendix B

Protocol IRB 020410-05

TO: Daniel Philbrick

CC: Betty Robinson

FROM: Jenni Hebert, Office of Research Compliance

DATE: February 9, 2010

RE: Perceived Effective Leadership Among Volunteer Firefighters

Notice of Evaluation- [EXEMPT 45 CFR 46.101(b) (2)]

The Office of Research Compliance (ORC) has evaluated the project named above. According to the information provided, you intend to assess the effectiveness of current leadership practices within Maine's volunteer firefighter organization. Data collection will involve an anonymous survey distributed to volunteer firefighters throughout all-volunteer fire departments in Maine. All collected information will be reported anonymously and will not include any information that may make it possible for subject or department identification. This is a minimal risk study.

This study has been granted an exemption from USM IRB review in accordance with 45 CFR 46.101 (b) (2), which provides for exemption for research involving the use of survey and interview procedures, unless (i) the information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing,

employability, or reputation. This designation is based on the assumption that the materials that you submitted to the IRB contain a complete and accurate description of all the ways in which human subjects are involved in your research.

This exemption is given with the following conditions:

1. You will conduct the project according to the plans and protocol you submitted;
2. No further contact with the ORC is necessary unless you make changes to your project or adverse events or injuries to subjects occur;
3. If you propose to make any changes in the project, you must submit the changes to the ORC for IRB review; you will not initiate any changes until they have been reviewed and approved by the IRB;
4. If any adverse events or injuries to subjects occur, you will report these immediately to the ORC;

The University appreciates your efforts to conduct research in compliance with the federal regulations that have been established to ensure the protection of human subjects in research.

Date of Exemption: February 9, 2010

Sincerely,

Jenni Hebert, Analyst

Office of Research Compliance