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# Tradition and progress: California fire technology directors beliefs and values

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# TRADTION AND PROGRESS:

# CALIFORNIA FIRE TECHNOLOGY DIRECTORS BELIEFS AND VALUES

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**Abstract**

This study explores the basic assumptions, beliefs, and occupational values of California Fire Technology Directors as they influence and socialize the next generation of firefighters entering the fire service. Definitions of industry culture, occupational culture, and organizational culture were applied to the fire service as well as the influence that heritage, traditions, values, meaning, and context play in the socialization process. Research methodology included emic and etic data collection techniques that documented the opinions and observations of the study group. Data from the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI) along with descriptive data collected during an ethnographic interview provides a window to the world of firefighting. Findings show that the beliefs and core-values of the Fire Technology Directors are influencing the next generation of emergency responders. Their ideas and beliefs opens the conversation on how to best adapt the industry to accommodate the incoming generation who own a different set of values, experiences, and beliefs.

*Keywords:* Industry Culture 1, Organizational Culture 2, Core-values 3, Firefighters 4, Fire Training 5, Fire Technology Directors 6, Community College 7, Health &Safety 8, Socialization 9, Heritage & Traditions

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# CHAPTER 1

It has long been accepted that firefighting is one of the most dangerous and life threatening occupations. Firefighters die every year from a wide range of causes that include structural collapse, electrocution, vehicle crashes, rapid fire progression, explosion, falls, and overexertion (Fahey, LeBlanc, & Molis, 2016). Industry-related organizations, such as the United States Fire Administration (USFA), the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC), the International Association of Fire Fighter's (IAFF), the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation (NFFF) and the National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) are all addressing the fundamental issues relating to injuries and death. These same organizations cite the "culture of the fire service" as a major factor in line of duty deaths (Siarnicki, 2010, p. 11).

Kunadharaju, Smith and DeJoy (2011) conducted an analysis of 189 firefighter fatality reports between 2004-2009 using data from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. Kunadharaju and colleagues (2011) found that there were four higher-order causes of firefighter death and injury: "insufficient resources, inadequate preparation, insufficient incident command structure, and suboptimal personnel readiness" (p. 1179). Their study reveals the basic DNA and core of the fire service belief system. They state that these four higher-order causes may be tapping into the basic culture of firefighting: "the job must get done, get done as quickly as possible, and with whatever resources are available" (Kunadharju, Smith, & DeJoy, 2011, p. 1179). From their research, they advocate for additional studies to define the culture of the fire and emergency service.

Regarding culture in the American fire and emergency service community, it has been said that "without the emergence of a new safety culture, all attempts [at increasing firefighter safety] will be in vain" (Siarnicki, 2010, p. 9). Introducing occupational change of this scale "is invariably met with equal and opposing social forces, creating an inevitable uphill battle for its effective implementation (DeCelles, Tesluk, Taxman, (2013)." In the fire service, there are people who thrive on adventure and extreme risk. They often form the front line of resistance to change believing that what worked for firefighters in the past will continue to work for them into the future. "Resistance to change is often cited as a significant characteristic of fire and emergency service culture. This sentiment is often expressed with a mixture of pride and amusement by slogans such as; "200 years of tradition unimpeded by progress." (Fire Department of New York (FDNY); IAFC, 2015, p. 11).

The FDNY slogan sets the tone for fire departments nationwide who emulate many of the traditions and values of the FDNY. The manifestation of "tradition" over "progress" can be seen in the material culture of many fire departments where, for example, the use of wooden ladders and leather helmets employed historically by New York firefighters are also seen in other metropolitan fire departments around the country. These departments cling to their traditional tools where as more practical lighter weight aluminum ladders and helmets that meet nationally approved standards are being used in more progressive fire departments. Regarding America's fire problem, Bland (1973) emphasized that:

> *"The fire service in America suffers what anthropologists call "cultural lag"; our methods of handling the fire problem are attuned to the America*

> *of yesteryear-not to contemporary needs, much less to future needs. They have changed slowly, while America has been changing rapidly" (p. 5).*

This observation about the cultural lag in the fire service is as true today as when it was written 40 years ago. Technologies have certainly been updated and improved upon in areas of personal protective equipment and self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA's), along with emerging technologies like global positioning systems (GIS), thermal imaging cameras, and drone aircrafts. These changes in tools and equipment are easier to communicate than changes in ideas. The cultural lag exists in the shared assumptions, beliefs, and values of the fire service. "External influences are now demanding compliance and adjustment, particularly in relation to occupational safety and health, but there is no question that the fire and emergency service culture strongly resists being told what to do (IAFC, 2015, 11)."

There is an expectation that fire service culture can be "changed at national, state and local levels without diminishing the quality of services provided by enhancing firefighter competencies needed at emergency scenes" (IAFC, 2015, p. 23). To be able to effectively create change in a culture that is as entrenched as the American fire service will undoubtedly require a multi-prong approach, over an extended period, directed at every level of fire service culture. "It is believed that both the culture and climate can be moved toward a common sense, safety-oriented approach to balance the risks and rewards of questionable behaviors better" (IAFC, 2015, p. 23). This is an achievable goal provided there is a clear understanding of how to deploy the tools and techniques of change management practiced by those in the field of organizational development.

The IAFC (2015) in partnership with the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) have joined the chorus for cultural change by publishing the most comprehensive document on fire service culture to date and provides an overview of the fire service as a culture. This document highlights the influence culture has had on the fire service by collating the historical record and the after-action reports, within the frame of fire service culture. The National Safety Culture Change Initiative (NSCCI) in summary, "provides a foundation for future work in this area" (IAFC, 2015, p. 23) with the implicit hope that it will become the springboard for additional research into the risk-taking behaviors that appears to be core to fire service culture.

But to truly understand a group's culture "you must attempt to get at its shared basic assumptions and understand the learning process by which such basic assumptions evolve" (Schein, 2010, p. 32). Trice and Beyer (1993) go on to suggest that in modern society organizational members are socialized into their specific roles by the organizations they affiliate with. Similarly, the fire service has evolved through a complex process of group learning. Within a six to seven-week fire academy, twenty-year-old firefighter recruits are socialized with the attitudes and values of 50-year-old firefighters. The IAFC (2015) reports that:

> *"While training is often viewed as an essential component to accomplish any type of positive change in fire fighter behavior, it is also frequently noted that inappropriate training is encouraging or reinforcing high-risk behaviors. This suggests that the problem may not be limited to inadequate training; it may also involve applicable training that establishes inappropriate attitudes, actions, beliefs and behaviors" (p. 17).*

Values both beneficial and counter-ideal are "learned and can be taught in training programs" (Fitzgerald & Desjardins, 2004, p. 134). For firefighters in California, the

socialization process begins by attending one of many Firefighter I Academies that dot the state. Community Colleges, as Trice and Beyer (1993) state, are especially important in socializing members for their work roles. In California, the community college system, provides an avenue to vocational education that includes Associate Degrees in Fire Science and certificates of completion for attending a Firefighter I Academy as it has for the past 40 years.

Our communities can be confident of cultural continuity in the fire service occupation, in as much as the educational system is empowered to instill the values and behaviors that are consistent with the heritage of the occupation. It is for this reason, that fire and emergency service training organizations "must be conscious of the behavioral influences that are incorporated within the content of their training programs, as well as the way training is being delivered" (USFA, 2015, p. 17).

Schein (2010) articulates that a good way to discover elements of a culture is by studying what new members of groups are taught, however, we can only learn of surface aspects of culture by this means. Schein (2010) goes on to add that:

> *"To get at those deeper levels, we must try to understand the perceptions and feelings that arise in critical situations, and we must observe and interview regular members or "old timers" to get an accurate sense of the deeper-level assumptions that are shared" (p. 19).*

In California, fire academies are managed by retired fire officers who have been in the emergency service business for several decades and who are then employed by the community college system to manage the fire technology and fire academy programs. Recognizing that the attitudes, beliefs and behaviors of the program directors and instructors may be just as influential on new members than the content of the actual

training programs, this purpose of this study is to examine the values and beliefs of the Fire Technology Directors as they influence the next generation of firefighters in California.

The California Fire Technology Directors are unique. They straddle the occupational culture of the fire service with the organizational culture of the community college system. They must balance their college fire training program to meet the requirements of the California Community College Chancellor's Office and Title 5 Education Code, the Office of the State Fire Marshal and Title 19 Public Safety Code relative to firefighter training, the rules and requirements of the specific college they work for, the community college fire advisory board made up of local fire chiefs and training officers (potential employers), as well as the needs of students and fire academy cadets. The California Fire Technology Directors appear to be conscious that they are modeling the actions that are consistent with the values and behavior they expect in their staff and students. Steeped in the traditions of the fire service profession, most of the fire technology directors have a strong belief in giving back to the profession that they themselves grew-up in. In many respects, the Fire Technology Directors exemplify examples of what the fire service can produced.

**Purpose**

This study answers the call for additional research on firefighter culture by focusing on the core beliefs, assumptions, and values that are communicated to new members entering the fire service. It is both important and appropriate to consider the role and influence values have on the culture of the fire service when considering a change initiative or intervention as suggested by the IAFC and the USFA. This study is

intended to discover the basic beliefs and assumptions that form a value system that is shared by California Fire Technology Directors as they may influence their training and education programs and by extension the next generation of firefighters. The purpose of this study is to identify the core-values of community college fire technology directors. Three primary research questions were identified:

1. Can Fire Technology Directors be defined as a specific cultural entity or sub-group within the fire service industry?
2. What are the shared core-values and beliefs of fire technology directors?
3. To what extent, if any, is the culture of the California Fire Technology training programs aligned to the perceived future needs of the fire service industry?

**Research Setting**

To understand the dichotomy between "tradition" and "progress" it is important to start at the source of socialization and indoctrination into this occupation. This will be done by interviewing California Fire Technology Directors to collect data on their assumptions, beliefs, and core-values. The community college system provides the largest percentage of basic firefighter training in the state of California. To accomplish this, both etic and emic data collection techniques will be employed to reveal the answers to the research questions. An e-mail invitation was sent to current Fire Technology Directors asking for volunteers to participate in this study. A link to the OCAI survey was included in the invitation along with available dates in which to schedule an ethnographic interview. Fire Technology Directors called-in from their offices in college campuses around the state. The interviews were approximately one-hour long. Fire

Technology Directors who participated in this study were happy to share their thoughts, feelings, and beliefs. The only demographic information collected was the number of years each director had in the fire service.

**Study Significance**

This study will add to the knowledge of cultural values, as practiced by the fire service industry, by examining the core-values of those who are charged with indoctrinating and socializing a next generation of firefighters. The knowledge gained by answering the research questions will be important to the future design of any effective change initiatives or interventions as recommended by the IAFC and USFA. This study looks at basic beliefs and values that exists just beyond conscious thought. Surfacing and evaluating these beliefs may inspire new ideas, attitudes and approaches for the California fire academy system.

**Organization of the Study**

Chapter 1 introduced the study by describing the interest, background, study purpose, research setting, and research significance. Chapter 2 provides an examination of relevant literature. Additional definitions of industry, occupational, and organizational culture is provided along with the significance core-values have on the targeted occupational culture. Chapter 3 describes an integrated research design and procedures related to sampling, (etic) surveys, and (emic) structured interviews.

In Chapter 4, the quantitative and qualitative results of the study will be reported. The results of the OCAI questionnaire are presented followed by a summary of the major themes identified in the interviews with the California Fire Technology Directors. Similarities and differences of the data sources will be summarized. Chapter 5 will

provide a discussion of the findings, including key conclusions, recommendations, limitations, and suggestions for future research in this area.

# CHAPTER 2

## Literature Review

The review of literature establishes the fire service at an industry, occupational, organizational, and sub-culture level. This section provides an operational definition of culture, values, meaning, and context along with examples of how the fire service embodies these meanings in their heritage and traditions.

## Culture Defined

Research at the cultural level of inquiry requires an operational definition of what culture is. One definition of culture refers to "the acquired knowledge that people use to interpret experience and generate social behavior" (Spradley, 1979, p. 5). This definition has been successfully applied to ethnographic research of national and ethnic cultures around the world. Ethnographic descriptions of culture help answer questions about the cultures organization, structure, beliefs, and world view. Decades later these ethnographic descriptions are used to recreate lineages, languages, and legal rights of indigenous peoples.

Spradely's (1979) definition of culture is too broad for an increasingly complex and modern application of today's organizational structures. Morgan (2006) demonstrates that "many of the major cultural similarities and differences in the world today are occupational rather than national, the similarities and differences associated with being a factory worker, a janitor, a government official, a banker, a store assistant, or an agricultural worker being as significant as those associated with national identity" (p. 118). A more precise definition of culture, and the one that will be applied to this study of fire service culture, is offered by Schein (2010):

> *"A pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems (p. 18)."*

In other words, culture provides people with mechanisms to cope with an uncertain world using acceptable processes for socially expressing and reaffirming their beliefs, values, and norms. When viewed through the lens of survival, as Schein's (2010) definition infers, culture is all about human adaptation to the environment, whether it be natural or manmade. As such, "the language of organizational culture can be appropriated as "glue" because it can be an enabler of preservation: it enables people to fight off threats and find points of collaboration even in times of disagreement" (Raid, 2007, p. 38). It has been observed, however, that the very strength of a culture can in fact resist and discourage needed change for the sake of the cultures own preservation (Trice & Beyer, 1993). From this perspective of adaptation and survival, Schein (201) adds:

> *"If we think of culture as, in part, a learned defense mechanism to avoid uncertainty and anxiety, then we should be able to help the organization assess for its self the strengths and weaknesses of its culture and to help it modify cultural assumptions if that becomes necessary for survival and effective functioning (p. 277)."*

The paradox seems obvious enough: if firefighter survival, in its literal meaning of survival while working in a hazardous fire environment, means adopting a safer posture and practice, why would any firefighter resist?

**Industry Culture**

As in many professions and occupations, culture operates at the industry, occupational, organizational, group, and individual levels of understanding. And, just as other professions, the fire service transcends the boundaries of organizational culture and

can be viewed from the perspective of an industry or macro-culture. National fire service organizations like the USFA, NFPA, IAFC, IAFF, the NFFF, and the NVFC operate at this macro-culture or industry level of analysis. Phillips (1994) supports the concept that culture can exist at the industry level. Phillips (1994) applies this definition of the 'core of cultural knowledge':

> *"A set of assumptions shared by the group of people. The set is distinctive to the group. The assumptions serve as guides to acceptable perception, thought, feeling, and behavior, and they are manifested in the group's values, norms, and artifacts. The assumptions are tacit among members, and are learned by and passed on to each new member of the group" (p. 10).*

Fire service leaders at the industry level have themselves experienced "the inherent risks of firefighting and emergency operations at a time when it was recognized and simply accepted as unavoidable occupational hazards" (IAFC, 2015, p. 5). As retired fire officers, the California Fire Technology Directors are operating at this level of cultural understanding when "generations of firefighters were subjected to extreme risks, in most cases because their mission was considered essential and there were few alternatives available to them" (IAFC, 2015, p. 5). Phillips (1994) further observes, "when cultural knowledge is shared at this level of analysis, an understanding of the core set of assumptions, should certainly allow insight into an industries perception of its environment, internal interpersonal relationships, and intra-industry structures and processes" (p. 385). This supports the concept of unique cultural identities at the level of industry culture, the criteria of which the fire service certainly meets. Phillip's (1994) conclusions also give credence to the current study in terms of investigating the shared belief systems of Fire Technology Directors to ascertain their belief and value system.

**Occupational Culture**

Research at the occupational level of culture also has precedent, "in that as members of different occupations, we are aware that being a doctor, lawyer, engineer, accountant, or manager involves not only learning technical skills but also adopting certain values and norms that define our occupation" (Schein, 2010, p. 8). The California Fire Technology Directors are unique in that they were raised in the occupational culture of the fire service, but they also operate in the organizational culture of the educational system of the California community college. Discovering the pattern of shared basic assumptions as the Fire Technology Directors try to solve their own problems of adaptation and integration will be beneficial in terms of defining Fire Technology Directors as a sub-culture of the fire service.

At the occupational level of analysis, the fire service bifurcates itself in terms of the 'fire environment'. That is, firefighters primarily identify with the specific firefighting environment they specialize in (e.g., urban (structural) firefighters, wildland firefighters, industrial firefighters). Each of these firefighting specializations recognize one another as members of the same macro culture. However, each of these major subgroups within the fire service recognize that the tools, techniques, and vocabulary of firefighters working in different fire environments have subtle but important cultural differences. The occupational level of culture for the American fire service can be best viewed through the same lens the fire service industry sees itself:

> *"The Northeastern fire service, for example, has some clear distinctions from the predominant culture of the Southwestern fire service, and both are distinct in certain ways from the fire service culture of the Pacific Northwest or the culture of the fire service in the Deep South or the Midwest. Many states talk of differing cultures from one area to another.*

> *Even neighboring departments boast or bemoan significant cultural differences, and in larger departments different cultures are said to reside at different stations or across different shifts" (Siarnicki & Gist, 2010, p. 1).*

The occupational lens provides a spectrum of fire service cultures that can be studied at various levels, not only as an occupational culture. This work can also be studied as an organizational culture manifested by a specific fire department, different fire stations within one department, cultural differences between shifts, and even at individual crew levels. There is research interest in smaller coherent units within fire department organizations such as the fire prevention or training bureaus, incident command structure, or in the culture of engine companies, truck companies, special operations (e.g., hazardous materials and/or technical rescue teams) and emergency medical teams all operating at the level of a micro-culture. From the level of an industry culture to the micro level of individual teams the basic DNA of fire service culture can be found ingrained in every layer.

As an occupational culture, the rich heritage of the fire service becomes evident in the traditions, values, beliefs, rituals, and rites that define membership in the fire service. This tradition is emulated in every fire academy around the country. Uniformed organizations, such as fire and emergency service organizations, represent "specific occupational cultures that are relatively isolated from society" (Soeters, 2000, p. 465). The paramilitary hierarchy, command structure, uniforms, and insignias provides members with a distinct identity and supports the idea of the fire service as a strong occupational culture.

Hall (2007) studied the masculinity in work-place identities of firefighters, hairdressers and real estate agents and found that "occupational membership influences action and meaning within organizations" (p. 534). It is this process of identification with like-minded occupational members that helps start the socialization process for new members in the culture. "We identify with other members of our occupational communities and enact our commitments to these communities in consequential ways at work" (Bechky, 2011, p. 1158).

If culture is a product of joint learning (Schein, 2010), then the shared assumptions about how to perform and relate as firefighters clearly demonstrates that the fire service has evolved into an occupational culture. "By focusing on meaning and interpretation, occupational membership, and work practices, working in this area can offer new perspectives that respond to theoretical challenges in understanding change and stability, organizational formation, and relationships between structures and action" (Bechky, 2011, p. 1163). The current study will add to our understanding of fire service culture, but is limited in time and scope to a singular focus on assumptions, basic beliefs and core-values. Values provide shared meaning and context for members of the culture, and it is these shared ideas that are truly what holds the fire service together as a culture.

**Values, Meaning, and Context**

"Today scholars and organizational leaders are recognizing that in the 21st century organizations will no longer be effectively managed by rigid objectives or instructions. Instead, their capacity for self-organization will be derived from how their members accept a shared set of values" (Dolan, 2003, p. 23). Values are used in the fire service to achieve a variety of goals, primarily in the context of saving lives and

protecting property. Shared values are the foundation for promoting strong organizational culture and by doing so enhancing organizational effectiveness. Deal and Kennedy (1982) stated, "values are the bedrock of any corporate culture. As the essence of a company's philosophy for achieving success, values provide a sense of common direction for all employees and guidelines for their day-to-day behavior" (p. 21).

"Since the 1980's there has been growing realization that the fundamental task facing leaders and managers rest in creating appropriate systems of shared meaning that can mobilize the efforts of people in pursuit of desired aims and objectives" (Morgan, 2006, 142). In that, culture is a shared system of meanings which is learned, revised, maintained, and defined by the people who are interacting in the context of their organizations, it is necessary to recognize the importance that meaning has in the human experience. Frankl (1978) observed that:

> *"It has been overlooked or forgotten that if a person has found meaning sought for, he is prepared to suffer, to offer sacrifices, even if need be, to give up his life for the sake of it. Contrariwise, if there is no meaning he is inclined to take his life, and he is prepared to do so even if all his needs, to all appearances, have been satisfied" (p. 20).*

Firefighter behavior is based on the meanings that things have for them. It is the organizational culture that provides the framework for meaning and context in which to interpret tasks around the fire station to the actions at the scene of an emergency. It becomes problematic for many in that, so much of our cultural communication is largely symbolic, and this potentially makes communication inaccurate because symbols often have more than one meaning. However, in a strong culture like the fire service, shared meanings are rich in context and are handled and/or modified through an interpretive

process with more accuracy in their understanding by the people dealing with life and death situations.

Frankl (1978) adds, “that the meaning of a situation must be unique and that unless we use the opportunity to fulfill the meaning inherent and dormant in every situation, it will pass and be gone forever” (p. 38). The interpretation of attitudes and behaviors is what Fire Technology Directors do when socializing new members into the context of firefighter culture. “Without this context, words and action have no meaning at all . . . it is the context that fixes the meaning” (Bateson, 1979, p. 15). It becomes necessary for members of any culture to take the symbolic clues they receive from their culture and extrapolate and translate them to get to the core meaning. In the context of saving lives and protecting property, this fortunately happens with a high degree of accuracy in the fire and emergency service.

**Role of Organizational Values**

Context and meaning provide the cognitive framework in the ‘mazeway’ (Wallace, 1956) of individuals within specific cultures. Mazeway is defined “as nature, society, culture, personality, and body image as seen buy one person” (Wallace, 1956, p. 266). Another way to visualize a cognitive mazeway is to imagine the classification system a person uses to categorize and organize their world. Values themselves “represent, in the form of conscious goals, responses to three universal requirements with which all individuals and societies must cope: needs of individuals as biological organisms, requisites of coordinated social interaction, and requirements for the smooth functioning and survival of groups” (Ros, 1999, p. 51). Rokeach (1973) goes on to define an individual’s values as:

> *''An enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence'' (p. 5)*

Values, in other words, provide a basis for informed choices and decisions. They are the principles of meaning that we apply to our world generally. Any action would be as good as another in the absence of a personal value system.

These definitions are important because it is human beings, in the context of their enduring beliefs and social interactions, that attach meaning to things. Organizations themselves do not have values; it is the people that inhabit organizations who do. These definitions also point out that there are many sources an individual can draw from in the construction of their value system such as personal values, societal values, organizational values, occupational values, religious values, as well as national or ethnic values.

"When values are espoused or shared they are typically stated in writing for all members of the organization, and are shared with other stakeholders, including the public" (Jaakson, 2010, p. 796-797). The espoused and shared values exist in organizational artifacts like the mission, vision, value statements, and strategic planning documents. These cultural artifacts exist at the level of conscious thought. But 'core-values' are unconscious; existing generally outside a person's awareness, they stand in stark contrast to the 'espoused values' or 'shared values' as they are not explicitly stated. "A strong value system is said to exist within an organization when members share key values related to acceptable behavior within the organization's strategic objectives; even more so, if members share the espoused values of their organizational leaders" (Paarlberg, Perry, 2007, p. 388).

"Official organizational values are used as a device for the achievement of cultural control" (Murphy & Davey, 2002, p. 17). These espoused or shared values serve to regulate the spheres of organizational activity in the behavior and often the character of its employees. Espoused values are important for strategic decision-making because they are at the foundation of the purpose and function of the organization. Fundamentally, "organizational value statements need to be seen in the light of both organizational practices and individual identity" (Murphy & Davey, 2002, p. 30).

Values are not easily fitted to organizational purpose in that an individual's values and an organization's espoused values maybe entirely different from what can be seen in practice. Murphy and Davey (2002) has observed that employees are keenly aware when the organization does not enact the values that it espouses - which in-turn leads to employee cynicism about the organizational values" (p. 30). The effectiveness of an organization is then called into question when employees perceive the discrepancy between the official espoused values of senior management and the way in which they enact them. Similarly, "when value statements that managers see as uncontroversial principles of normal everyday behavior-- can be seen by employees as either irrelevant or, worse, patronizing and offensive slights on their moral integrity" (Murphy & Davey, 2002, p. 30). An espoused organizational value like 'honesty' could be construed by the membership as an organization that does not trust its members. Even worse, an organization could espouse a value of accountability, where the employees see that the leadership team is not being held to the same standard.

"Individuals may hold values that are in conflict across different sources of values or the content of values" (Paarlberg & Perry, 2007, p. 388). This becomes problematic

when introducing a new value system to a culture with no attempt to reinforce or interpret the new system and align it with the individuals existing system of meaning. To this end, there needs to be a conscious effort on the part of the Fire Technology Directors to reinforce and embed new values in a way that aligns with an individual's sense of purpose with that of the fire service. Not making this effort at alignment will lead to ambiguous and ambivalent attitudes towards the value system and ultimately to a general indifference towards it.

"Counter-ideal values are a blind spot in terms of both their theoretical conceptualization and their application in practice" (Van Quaquebeke, Graf, Kerschreiter, Schuh, & Van Dick, 2014, p. 220). Success for new members of a culture depends on how quick they can identify the counter-ideal values or organizational taboos. In the fire service, teamwork is a highly regarded organizational value. Members who do not recognize this and who are not pitching-in and helping-out quickly become ostracized. The framework of what organizational life will be like, and will not be like, for firefighters exists in their ability to contrast the espoused values against the counter-ideal values.

**Fire Service Values**

The mission and values of the fire service, in the context of chaos theory (Dolan, Garcia, Auerbach, 2003), acts as a strange attractor around which firefighter behaviors self-organize. This behavior is realized in their decision-making processes, their altruism, basic beliefs, and how firefighters interrelate among themselves all of which is contained within the vessels of heritage and traditions of the American Fire Service.

Public-sector employees working in hierarchical structured government organizations articulate their values clearly. These are the same values that public-sector employees, such as firefighters, police officers and social workers, continuously use to make street level decisions. The essence of every mission statement for most fire service-related organizations can be reduced to some version of 'saving lives and protecting property.' This mission is core to the belief systems of fire and emergency services. Decisions, from the mundane daily operations of the fire department to the strategic decision of an incident commander are influenced with this mission firmly imbedded.

Helmig, Hinz and Ingerfurth (2015) showed that altruism exists as an equally important value for public sector employees as it does for businesses and nonprofit organizations. Firefighters take the concept of altruism literally in that they are willing to sacrifice themselves for the sake of others and each other. This is an important core-values attached to the mission of protecting property and saving lives. "The image of the firefighter, which is the foundation of the fire and emergency service culture, was built around selfless heroism — the firefighter is always ready to face any risk and, if necessary, to make the supreme sacrifice to save lives and property" (IAFC, 2015, p. 5).

Tuckey and Hayward (2011) studied team dynamics of firefighters in terms of their camaraderie and espirit de corps. "Camaraderie is defined as feelings of belonging, a sense of shared identity, reciprocal trust, and the strong positive bonds that exist within cohesive work groups" (Tuckey & Hayward, 2011, p. 6). The very practice of firefighting is analogous to a team sport in that it takes the effort of an entire crew to accomplish an objective. To be successful every member of the team needs to know not only their role, but the role of every other member of their team. If one team member gets delayed, then

the other members can step-in to help or even take over the role. A fire-ground operation, when performed successfully, looks as if it were choreographed. From this perspective, it is not surprising that the fire service has created and maintained a culture that encourages team bonds, trust, and identity. Wrapped in the value of altruism it is understandable why and how a firefighter would risk his own life to save that of another person.

Near brushes with disaster are met with humor and off center jokes. Occupational identity can also be found in a firefighting culture that values jokes often in the context of gallows humor. "Firefighting has life and death consequences – yet humor is purposefully applied in this context" (Moran & Roth, 2013, p. 16).

Espirit de corps, camaraderie, altruism, and humor all help form occupational frames around the belief that members have the exclusive right to perform a given set of related tasks. Firefighting culture match many of the characteristics that contribute to favorable occupational identities as reported by Trice and Beyer (1993):

1. *"Facing danger, and lay claim to exceptional traits of character particularly persistent courage." Firefighters face obvious danger in their work and identify with their roles as hero's.*
2. *"Possessing esoteric skills, often through a certification examination that must be passed to acquire a license or certificate." The minimum requirement for a firefighter in California is a Firefighter I certificate obtained after attending a 6 to 8-week accredited community college fire academy and then awarded a Firefighter I certificate by the Office of the State Fire Marshal.*
3. *"Providing a socially valuable service". Protecting the life and safety of citizens and their property from fire or other disasters is considered by many communities a valuable service. (p. 183-184).*

The storied heroics of firefighters saving lives, property and the environment provide a self-image where anyone who wears a uniform is considered a hero. This occupational frame provides a unifying narrative. But, just as strong cultures block efforts at changing the status quo, the bonds that form around a positive self-image that unite occupational groups can also prevent their ability to objectively consider new ideas or to generate knowledge from all levels of the organization, or from different factions within the organization. Hansen (1995) describes that:

> *"The knowledge that occupational cultures can be strong on one hand, but can also thwart any potential change efforts on the other, provides a clear first step; to develop a rational understanding of their own occupational frames and monitor the effects of their own ethno-centrism" (p. 64).*

The quandary of fire service culture is the importance placed on teams who have bonded and who perform well at the scene of an emergency are then also potential points of resistance when attempting to introduce change to the organizations status quo.

Another phenomenon that makes change in fire service culture difficult is the observation that "the current fire and emergency service generation has been raised in an environment that glorifies risk and expresses little or no concern for the potential negative consequences of bad decisions" (IAFC, 2015, p. 22). Fire academy cadets of today represent a generation of young people who grew-up on films like 'Jackass' that glorifies risk taking, primarily among young males. The IAFC (2015) further explains the impact of these behaviors:

> *"The Internet along with tremendous expansion in the use of social media outlets, such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, and the influence of national fire service websites provide a continual supply of video clips and photos showing individuals risking life and limb in the pursuit of thrills and recognition. While many of these efforts result in obvious injuries, the*

> *consequences of such misadventures are never included in the video that is posted. There is an aura that even anonymous recognition for extreme daring is sufficient justification to accept the consequences of failure (p. 22)."*

This new 'risk at any cost' value system adds a challenge to creating a safety culture within the fire service profession. But this is not an insurmountable problem, as suggested by Hansen (1995). Through an understanding of occupational frames, we can monitor the effects of occupational ethnocentrism. Rokeach and McLellan (1972) demonstrated that long term changes in values, attitudes and behavior can be achieved by providing objective feedback of information about one's own values and attitudes. Rokeach and McLellan (1972) added that:

> *"Such feedback made many of the subjects consciously aware of certain contradictions chronically existing within their own value-attitude system, resulting in cognitive and behavioral changes that were observed many weeks and up to 21 months after a single experimental treatment" (p. 236).*

Studies such as this, maybe key in identifying the attraction related to the 'risk at any cost' and bridging the value system towards that of safety in firefighting culture, by harnessing objective feedback to spotlight contradictions in firefighter value systems.

**Guiding Organizational Values**

Firefighters, are primarily government employees who are tasked with operating in complex and stratified organizational structures. These structures are based on hierarchically imposed rules, procedures, and formalized roles. Using existing or new organizational values may offer an effective method of achieving change by managing and coordinating many diverse and competing belief systems within this type of organizational structure. An important skill for fire officers will be in their ability to

guide behaviors of department members once the risks and pitfalls of doing so are known.

The literature suggests that organizations "radically committed to business based values are more successful than organizations that do not" (Malbašić, Rey, & Potočan, 2015, p. 439). However, as Kirkhaug (2009) points out, with the introduction of a new value system, managers must consider the resistance to the change initiative along with the possibility that the new concept may add to existing systems, values, and processes. This may create additional stress on the organization, but the long-term benefits may outweigh the short-term disruption. The research on values management is compelling enough to interest fire service leaders knowing that the "unofficial cultural and subcultural norms could override the impact of officially espoused, but unembedded, values" (Murphy, 2002, p. 17).

Adaptation to changing environments further suggests that the fire service may need to deal with a set of new values and incorporate them into daily work inside their organizations. Values are enduring but not always consistent and this provides the greatest opportunity for organizational development to work towards integration and alignment. "The clear path of transformational change ultimately involves the creation of "new contexts" that can break the hold of dominate attractor patterns in favor of new ones" (Morgan, 2006, p. 257). The introduction of new values act as disorder organizers and provides the opportunity for creating new contexts. It will be these "major changes in organizational context that determine what values will hold the key for the organization to excel" (Buenger, 1996, p. 571).

"The very process of values management is a social process" (Paarlberg & Perry, 2007, p. 396). Considering the need for new context, fire officers will play a key role in the interpretation of organizational values mixed with firefighter values and their everyday work responsibilities. Fire officers can reinforce the value system by communicating and rewarding performance toward those values. As such, fire officers play key roles as interpreters and integrators, connecting organization strategy to firefighter's functional values that derive from their own societal and cultural experiences.

One pitfall is that the interactions between firefighters and fire officers that create social values and efforts to control and mandate conformity may backfire if the routinization of these social processes occur. An annual performance review may reinforce organizational values but by itself becomes a routinized effort with little impact on employee behavior. It should be the ability of the fire officer to interpret the daily actions and activities in the frame of the organizational values where the greatest impact for reinforcement of those values lies. Paarlberg and Perry (2007) noted that over time:

> *"The work units that reported the highest levels of performance were ultimately those units in which managers resisted the standardization of the new management systems and instead used the flexibility of the management systems to foster social interactions and even create their own rules of governance" (p. 396).*

Employees must be reminded that values are more than just words. Values management is a more active and purposeful process; to watch an action and interpret it in terms of the organizational values. Organizations cannot effectively influence employee behavior by communicating the values through formal presentations or the distributing them on the bulletin boards in employee dining rooms. The process of

aligning values is a social process that occurs through daily interactions between employees, managers, and perhaps even customers and other stakeholders. For values to gain influence in an organization, they must be integrated into every employee-related process; "from the first interview to the last day of work, employees should be constantly reminded that the values form the basis for every decision the organization makes" (Fitzgerald & Desjardins, 2004, p. 134).

**Role of Heritage & Tradition**

Culture is time-bound. There must be a shared history of external adaptation and internal integration that once learned is then taught to new members. It would be difficult to argue that any organization has culture if it does not also have a shared history associated with it. Schein's (2010) definition of culture stands in contrast of a definition provided decades earlier by Kluckhorn (1951): "As patterned ways of thinking, based upon traditional and historical ideas" (p. 86). It is apparent that an understanding needs to be developed for the important role heritage and tradition play in organizational behavior at the micro and macro levels of analysis. Heritage and tradition need to be included as a preface in any organizational cultural assessment. With over 200 years of American Fire Service in historical record, there is a significant and rich heritage to tap into.

"Firemen are paid to extinguish to or control fire with the least possible damage to persons and property" (Gowell, 1932, p. 3). This statement is but another variation on the mission to 'save lives and protect property' that can be found in the historical documents of the American Fire Service. For example, the 'Trade Analysis of Fire Engineering (1932)' published by the Los Angeles Fire Department, nuggets of cultural values of the time can be found such as:

> *"Take advantage of every opportunity for study and training; complete application to duty; subordinate self to constituted authority; avoid placing personal interests above that of organization; maintain high standards" (Gowell, 1932, p. 2).*

The question then, if the fire service is known to cling to and try to preserve past traditions, are values like placing the interest of the organization above yourself as valid today as when they were written 84 years ago?

If we find that the traditions of the fire service have indeed started to change, are the values of the fire service changing as well? Frankl (1978) observed that "values are disappearing because they are transmitted by traditions and (today) we are facing a decay in our traditions" (p. 37). Even if the cultural values have held steadfast, it would still be appropriate in "the design of an organizational cultural analysis to account for the construction and role of heritage and tradition" (Weber, 2011, p. 289).

Heritage is found in the meaning placed on the historical events, processes, tangible artifacts, and the representations created from these meanings. The Maltese Cross, Dalmatian dogs, collar brass, shoulder patches, and uniforms are all examples of artifacts with historic and symbolic significance to American firefighter culture. Conversely, not all the past can be considered heritage if there is no meaning attached to it by the membership of current firefighters.

Traditions are beliefs or behaviors that are passed down from one generation to the next. The 'war stories' often told around the firehouse kitchen or in the training classrooms are a function of the fire services oral history. Traditions are an important aspect of heritage and could be thought of in terms of a cultural inheritance. "Traditions are infused with value and meaning and are oftentimes associated with myths or

narratives about their creation or continued existence" (Dacin & Dacin, 2008, p. 330). In their relationship to organizational culture, traditions become then the strategic material for organizational change and maintenance in the stories firefighters tell one another.

There is recognition that the fire service has proud traditions and deeply held beliefs, as observed by Siarnicki and Gist (2010):

> *"Our core will never change; nor should they change, we believe in honor, in courage, in valor, and in self-sacrifice. We believe in brotherhood and fraternity. But we are also known to take risks that may not need to be taken that produce consequences too dire to be left unquestioned, and we are known, even among ourselves, too often resist change and intervention (p. 3)."*

When considering organizational change in the fire service, there needs to be a conscious effort to pick the best part of the past to carry forward into the future. In the words of Hofstede and Peterson (2000), "uniformed organizations must balance their attempts to introduce new ways of working ... with the necessity of preserving traditional basics" (p. 481).

Cultural reproduction and reinforcement through socialization of the heritage and traditions of a homogeneous community like the fire service is an important process for purposes of cultural continuity. In the fire academy system, this cultural reinforcement is accomplished by fire officers who are well versed in local and national fire history the lessons of which form the foundation for firefighter survival. To complete a cultural analysis would suggest the need for understanding the role of heritage and tradition in each fire service organization. Infused with value, heritage and traditions become the repositories of cultural material that assign meaning to current practices with the old logics of our past. It is at this juncture that "the toolkits for manufacturing and reproducing traditions and heritage are passed down through successive generations,

providing raw material for identity formation, market creation, and cultural integrity" (Weber, 2011, p. 294). The role of heritage and traditions in the fire service is core to a firefighter's identity. The interpretation of our traditions, and redefining our heritage in terms of their application in the future, is the role of the socialization process practiced by Fire Technology Directors and fire instructors. These fire officers need to be conscious of this role and recognize the importance as they prepare and initiate the next generation of firefighters.

**Summary**

Researchers, from Kurt Lewin (1947) to Edgar Schein (2010), have focused on the basic beliefs and assumptions of people in organizational settings to gain insight into the shared mindsets that underpin perception, thought, feeling, behavior, and activity within an organizational context. While this focus is not predictive of individual behavior, Phillips (1994) observed that:

> *"Awareness of these assumptions is a starting point from which both organization researchers and group participants can anticipate and interpret activities within the organization setting such as decision making, identification of threats and opportunities, intra-and inter-group interaction, adoption of organization structures and processes, and socialization of new members" (p. 384).*

This chapter provided a review of the literature that establishes a foundation for the awareness of the fire service at an industry, occupational, organizational, and sub-culture level of understanding. Evidence presented here not only provides an operational definition of culture, values, meaning and context but also an awareness of how the fire service embodies these definitions and meanings in the heritage and traditions of the American Fire Service.

# CHAPTER 3

## Methodology

The purpose of this study is to identify the core-values of community college fire technology directors. To accomplish this purpose, the research design and methodology draws on both etic and emic data collection techniques. This framework integrates data from both research traditions and avoids limitations of purely etic or purely emic findings.

Etic and emic denote two approaches, described by Pelto (1978), of studying behavior as from either outside or inside a cultural system, respectively. The etic, or outside approach, is data collected from cultural viewpoint and framework of the researcher. The quantitative data collected in this approach will establish fire technology directors as a distinct sub-group of the fire service occupation and how they see their current culture in contrast with a preferred culture. On the other hand, the emic approach collects qualitative data from the perspective of the people within the culture being studied (Pelto & Pelto, 1978, p. 62). Qualitative data from this technique will provide an understanding for the beliefs of the fire technology directors as they influence the training and socialization of new firefighters. Using both data collection techniques will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the occupational culture of Fire Technology Directors.

Of the 112 community college campuses in California, over 40 campuses across the state offer basic Firefighter I Academies and many offer two year degrees in Fire Science. For this study, California community college Fire Technology Directors were recruited to participate. An e-mail with a link to the Organizational Culture Assessment

Instrument (OCAI: Cameron & Quinn, 2011) was distributed statewide to the target population. The distribution of the OCAI survey represents a "structured quantitative approach, that allows multiple viewpoints to be considered in evaluating the attributes of an organization's culture" (Cameron & Quinn, 2011, p. 170). There are several advantages to collecting the data with this etic tool:

- The survey questions have been validated and used in thousands of organizations.
- The data from OCAI survey distributed across different organizational cultures provides the ability to conduct comparisons among multiple cultures using quantitative approaches (Cameron & Quinn, 2011, p. 171).
- The OCAI is unique in its ability to identify the organization's cultural strength, congruence, and type quickly (Cameron & Quinn, 2011, p. 175).
- The collected data serves as a baseline to measure and evaluate success, or failures, by re-surveying the organization at the end of a change management program using the same survey instrument.

E-mails were sent to 87 Fire Technology Directors and fire academy coordinators who each received a link to the OCAI survey, an Informed Consent form, and an invitation to participate in the one-on-one interviews scheduled over a 2-day period. The survey was open for ten days. Each respondent received the results of their own survey. The researcher received an aggregate of all 12 surveys collected.

The OCAI survey (Cameron & Quinn, 2011) models the Competing Values Framework. This framework consisted of four Competing Values that correspond with four unique types of organizational culture. They found that every organization has a

mix of these cultural characteristics which includes: Clan, Adhocracy, Market and Hierarchical. These cultural characteristics can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1**

***OCAI Cultural Characteristics***

| **The Clan Culture (Collaborate)** | **The Adhocracy Culture (Create)** |
|---|---|
| A very friendly place to work where people share a lot of themselves. It is like and extended family. The leaders, or head of the organization, considered to be mentors and, maybe even, parent figures. The organization is held together by loyalty or tradition. Commitment is high. The organization emphasizes the long-tem benefits of human resource development and attaches great importance to cohesion and morale. Success is defined in terms of sensitivity to customers and concern for people. The organization places a premium on teamwork, participation, and consensus. | A dynamic, entrepreneurial and creative place to work. People stick their necks out and take risks. The leaders are considered to be innovators and take risks. The glue that holds the organization together is a commitment to experimentation and innovation. The emphasis is on being on the leading edge. The organization's long-term emphasis is on growth and acquiring new resources. Success means gaining unique and new products or services. Being a product or service leader is important. The organization encourages individual initiative and freedom. |
| **The Hierarchy Culture (Control)** | **The Market Culture (Compete)** |
| A very formal and structured place to work. Procedures govern what people do. The leaders pride themselves on being good coordinators and organizers who are efficiency minded. Maintaining a smoothly running organization is most critical. Formal Rules and policies hold the organization together. The long-term concern is on stability and performance with efficient, smooth operations. Success is defined in terms of dependable delivery, smooth scheduling, and low cost. The management of employees is concerned with secure employment and predictability. | A results oriented organization. The major concern is getting the job done. People are competitive and goal orientated. The leaders are hard drivers, producers, and competitors. They are tough and demanding. The glue that holds them together is an emphasis on winning. Reputation and success are common concerns. The Lon-term focus is on competitive actions and achievement of measureable goals and targets. Success is defined in terms of market share and penetration. Competitive pricing and market leadership are important. The organizational style is hard-driving competitiveness. |

*From Cameron and Quinn (2011). Reprinted with permission.*

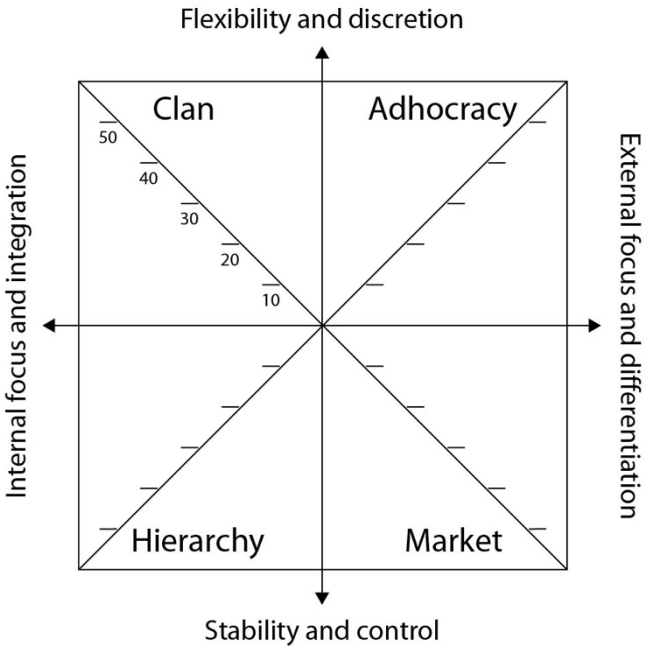
The 12 responses received from the OCAI survey (Cameron & Quinn, 2011) will serve to define the Fire Technology Directors as a specific sub-group of the firefighting culture. Their responses as a group will demonstrate how closely aligned they are to the six elements scored in the survey which are: Dominate Characteristics, Organizational Leadership, Management of Employees, Organizational Glue, Strategic Emphasis, and Criteria of Success. The OCAI survey will also ascertained how closely aligned the Fire Technology Directors are in their current culture compared to their preferred culture.

The four cultural characteristics are recorded on a graph, with the opposite

characteristics types in each corner. To the left of the graph, the organization is internally focused and to the right, the organization is externally focused. At the top of the graph, the organization desires flexibility and discretion, while at the bottom, the organization wants stability and control. This can be seen in detail in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

***Competing Values Framework***




From Bremer (2017). Reprinted with permission.

To complete this assessment instrument, Fire Technology Directors were asked to divide 100 points over the four culture types. They were recording their opinions for the college or organization in which they currently worked. This method measures the extent to which one of the four culture types dominates the present organizational culture. The Fire Technology Directors were asked to provide feedback on six dimensions of their own organizations which included: Dominant Characteristics, Organizational Leadership, Management of Employees, Organization Glue, Strategic Emphasis, Criteria of Success

The desire for change is measured by taking the same test a second time but asking the Fire Technology Directors what they would like to see in their preferred organization. The difference between the current culture and the preferred culture demonstrate the degree that organizational change needs or does not need to be addressed. Differences of over 10 points are especially relevant and should provide the rationale for the college to take-action.

The emic approach collects data from the viewpoint of the people indigenous to the culture. Malinowski (1922) described this as grasping the natives point of view, his relation to life, to realize his vision of his world (p. 25). This methodology draws from the tradition of ethnography as it is applied to organizational development. In ethnographic field work, researchers can make "cultural inferences from three sources: (1) from what people say; (2) from the way people act; and (3) from the artifacts that people use" (Spradley, 1979, p. 8). The scope of this study is limited to capturing what people think and say during a one-on-one telephone interview. Important to the interviews, as practiced by Spradley (1979), is in learning what fire technology directors have already learned for themselves in the span of their careers, as a set of categories in which they themselves define fire service culture. Ten fire technology directors responded to the invitation to be interviewed. One participant was interviewed but excluded from the study because he did not have the requisite 5-year fire-career experience to be a Fire Technology Director.

Ethnographic interviews for nine participants were conducted over the telephone in two days with the researcher recording responses in a tabled form. Each participant was asked if they had read the Informed Consent and were reminded of the purpose of the

study. Participants were asked to have pen and paper available so that they could also take notes of their own responses to the research questions as their responses would be reviewed at the end for accuracy.

Open-ended research questions were developed from concepts discovered in the literature review. The first question was used to both establish rapport with the interviewee and gain historical insight: “How long have you been associated with the fire service and in that time frame have you seen any changes in firefighter behavior?” The next question was predicated on a concept presented by Deal and Kennedy (1982) in which they describe values as a philosophy of success. The second open-ended research question asked the interviewees: “What makes a person a successful firefighter?” The third question was intended to capture the counter-ideal values described as blind spots by Van Quaquebeke and colleagues (2014) that could help define organizational taboos within the culture: “How are firefighters unsuccessful in their careers?” Finally, the last question asked the interviewees: “Have you shared the same information with your faculty, staff and students?”

The response to these questions were collected and the researcher recorded the ideas into three columns: dominate ideas, story richness, and important themes (Appendix A). The dominate ideas were recorded in the order the respondents replied to each question. Definition of terms or descriptive stories were recorded by the researcher in the richness column. Finally, the researcher reviewed the responses and asked if the list of dominate characteristic for ideal values and counter-ideal values were in the correct order of importance in the mind of the interviewee.

The ethnographic interviews were designed to get the Fire Technology Directors to reveal their own ordering system which would in-turn allow the researcher to analyze and compare each of their responses to one another. Answers to open-ended questions in the interview provided an opportunity for deeper inquiry and follow-up questions about the meaning of the terms used.

The ethnographic interview format was set-up in such a way that allowed the researcher to partially code the information from the perspective of the participants as it was being recorded. This was a first step in the codification of data as described by Creswell (2014) as a multiple step process to discern patterns, themes, and to extract meaning in the qualitative data that was presented. A content analysis (Pelto, 1978) of the descriptive accounts allowed for themes and patterns to be discovered. By placing the three highest order values in a separate table for each of the nine participants, the process of chunking together patterned relationships in the ideas presented by the participants was accomplished. Patterns first emerged for the internal characteristics of firefighters (e.g., dedicated, committed, integrity) then external characteristics were seen (e.g., strength, coordination, skills). When these values were placed in a quadrant the elements of the firefighter as an individual and firefighter within the community also emerged. The same quadrant worked equally well in identifying patterns for counter-ideal values.

The answers to the interview questions provided a window on the construct of cultural values along with counter-ideal value which will form the foundation of cultural analysis in Chapter 5.

**Summary**

Chapter 3 presented the methodology and rationale for the research design and data collection. The selection of participants, how the data was collected and how it was analyzed have all been revealed in this chapter. In Chapter 4 the results of the survey and the details of the interviews for this study will be presented.

# CHAPTER 4

## Results

In this study to identify the core-values of community college Fire Technology Directors, the research design and methodology included the distribution of the OCAI survey (Quinn & Cameron, 2011) and ethnographic interviews drawing on both etic and emic data collection techniques. Data was collected from a State-wide cross-section of the targeted population.

## OCAI Survey

The results from the survey indicate that two dimensions of congruence exists in Organizational Leadership and Criteria for Success. Other dimensions however are not as congruent in the current culture and the preferred culture. The differences between the current and future culture represents an opportunity to start a conversation on how to bridge the gap so it doesn't become a larger organizational problem in the future. The results of the California Fire Technology Director's OCAI survey (Quinn & Cameron, 2011) and the six dimensions can be found in Table 2.

**Total OCAI results.** The response of 12 California Fire Technology Directors to the OCAI survey shows that the dominant culture is Clan culture followed by Hierarchy culture, Market culture, and Adhocracy culture. The Fire Technology Directors have an emphasis placed on a people-friendly working environment where coworkers and teamwork are important.

**Table 2**

*Total OCAI Results and Six Dimensions*

| Fire Technology Directors: OCAI Total Results | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Group** | **Organization: Current** | **Organization: Preferred** |
| Clan | 35.69 | 39.10 |
| Adhocracy | 16.74 | 20.21 |
| Market | 22.08 | 18.82 |
| Hierarchy | 25.49 | 21.88 |
| **Total** | 100 | 100 |

| Dominant Characteristic | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Group** | **Current** | **Preferred** |
| Clan | 29.17 | 31.25 |
| Adhocracy | 15.42 | 22.92 |
| Market | 30.83 | 26.25 |
| Hierarchy | 24.58 | 19.58 |
| **Total** | 100 | 100 |

| Organizational Leadership | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Group** | **Current** | **Preferred** |
| Clan | 28.75 | 30.42 |
| Adhocracy | 16.67 | 15.83 |
| Market | 22.50 | 23.76 |
| Hierarchy | 32.08 | 30.00 |
| **Total** | 100 | 100 |

| Management of Employees | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Group** | **Current** | **Preferred** |
| Clan | 46.25 | 37.50 |
| Adhocracy | 15.42 | 22.08 |
| Market | 18.75 | 18.33 |
| Hierarchy | 19.58 | 22.08 |
| **Total** | 100 | 100 |

| Organizational Glue | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Group** | **Current** | **Preferred** |
| Clan | 37.08 | 47.50 |
| Adhocracy | 14.58 | 19.58 |
| Market | 21.25 | 17.08 |
| Hierarchy | 27.08 | 15.83 |
| **Total** | 100 | 100 |

| Strategic Emphasis | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Group** | **Current** | **Preferred** |
| Clan | 30.42 | 36.67 |
| Adhocracy | 20.00 | 24.17 |
| Market | 19.58 | 13.75 |
| Hierarchy | 30.00 | 25.42 |
| **Total** | 100 | 100 |

| Criteria of Success | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Group** | **Current** | **Preferred** |
| Clan | 42.50 | 51.25 |
| Adhocracy | 18.33 | 16.67 |
| Market | 19.58 | 13.75 |
| Hierarchy | 19.58 | 18.33 |
| **Total** | 100 | 100 |

In these results, the preferred culture pulls toward the Clan culture and away from the Market culture. Clan culture being a more familial organizational style subscribed generally by fire service occupational cultures. The pull away from Marketing culture makes sense for this study group in that, aggressive advertising is frowned upon in this group. The community colleges are sensitive to being viewed as 'puppy mills,' which refers to cranking out young firefighters into a workforce that they might be ill-prepared to face. Results also indicate there is a pull slightly away from the Hierarchy culture of stability and control as an internal focus and instead towards an Adhocracy culture with a degree of flexibility and external focus. This suggests a desire for less structure and control and a desire to experiment on the other-hand. The preferred culture represents a harmonious balance of culture types for fire service related training organizations.

**Dominant characteristics.** Results show that Market culture scores highest of the dominant characteristics. Market culture is a results-oriented approach where a major concern is getting the job done (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). This is followed by Clan culture, Hierarchy culture and Adhocracy culture.

In this dimension, Market culture is dominant, but in the preferred culture there is a pull away from it and a push towards Clan Culture. Market culture is not a dominant characteristic in other dimensions. This suggests that current culture in focused on getting things done and filing classroom seats with students. Taking the results of other dimension in consideration, the Fire Technology Directors are not particularly comfortable in the Market culture dimension.

Importantly, this dimension reports a significant difference between current and preferred Adhocracy culture and Hierarchy culture. This difference would suggest that

Fire Technology Directors need to give attention to finding a balance with stability and control and a more creative and innovative culture.

**Organizational leadership.** In this dimension, Hierarchy culture dominates. Here the leaders are coordinators and organizers, followed by Clan Culture they also have the qualities of mentors and parent figures. Market culture follows, with practice of hard drivers, producers and competitors, but with a lower Adhocracy score, these leaders are least likely to be considered innovators and risk takers. The differences between the current and the preferred in this dimension are minimal. As organizational leaders, the Fire Technology Directors show a high degree of congruence in this dimension.

**Management of employees.** Teamwork, consensus, and participation are important considerations with the management of employees and students with Clan culture surpassing Hierarchy culture in this dimension.

In this dimension, both Clan culture and Adhocracy culture call for further attention with a decrease of 8.75 points in Clan Culture and an increase of 6.67 points in Adhocracy culture. This suggests a desire for less hands-on with employees or students and a desire for more creativity problem solving or innovation from them. Hierarchy culture increases with 2.50 points in preferred culture along with an increase of 6.67 points in Adhocracy culture creating a balance in this axis.

**Organizational glue.** Loyalty and mutual trust are what hold this organization together. Commitment to this organization runs high with the dominance of Clan culture with Hierarchy, Market, and Adhocracy culture trailing behind.

There is an incongruence in the current and preferred Hierarchy culture and Clan culture. The point difference between the current and the preferred culture is greater than

10 (-11.25 and +10.42 points respectively). The glue that holds the organization together appears to need attention in this dimension. The preference in this dimension is consistently Clan culture dominate, with a balance of Hierarchy and Adhocracy cultures and less emphasis on market culture.

**Strategic emphasis.** In this dimension, strategic emphasis pulls toward both Clan and Hierarchy culture. The strategic emphasis is on people with a high degree of trust and openness within institutional permanence and stability. There is a stronger pull toward Adhocracy in this dimension suggesting that the need to differentiate themselves and to prospect for new opportunities. There is a lack of congruence between the current and preferred culture in each culture type. Once again, there seems to be a pull away from market culture with a push toward Clan culture. There also seems to be a pull away from hierarchy and push toward adhocracy.

**Criteria for success.** Clearly success for this organization is focused on people and their development, teamwork, and commitment to one another. The difference between the current and the preferred culture pushes again toward Clan culture and pulls away from Market culture. There are only subtle shifts in Hierarchy and Adhocracy cultures that are almost equally balanced in current and preferred cultures.

## Summary

The OCAI survey (Quinn & Cameron, 2011) overall revealed a symmetry in both current culture and preferred culture. Clan culture was shown to be dominant with a desire for an equal balance between Hierarchy and Adhocracy cultures with less emphasis on Market culture. The focus of Fire Technology Directors is clearly on people both in the organization and the students they train. In a highly-regulated industry, there

appears to be a desire for less structure and control and more latitude for experimentation and the ability to differentiate themselves from one another.

Organizational Leadership and Criteria for Success were two dimensions that had the highest degree of congruence. There should be concern for the dimensions that have the greatest degree of incongruence between current culture and preferred culture: Dominate Characteristics with a desire for less emphasis on Market culture, Organizational Glue with less emphasis on Hierarchical culture, and Strategic Emphasis that calls for a course correction in all four cultural areas.

It was important to use the OCAI survey (Quinn & Cameron, 2011) to draw a defining boundary around Fire Technology Directors as their own unique sub-culture within the larger occupational culture of the fire service. This was successful in that there appears to be a pattern of shared basic assumptions amongst the study group. The California Fire Technology Directors Association (CFTDA) is the one organization where this unique sub-group can share and validate one another's efforts in this mission. The OCAI survey (Quinn & Cameron, 2011) results documented the hopes and desires of this group. The ethnographic interviews provided descriptive details into the shared beliefs and values of this sub-culture.

**Ethnographic Interviews**

There were nine Fire Technology Directors who volunteered to be interviewed and represented community colleges fire technology and fire academy programs from around the state. Demographic information was collected to validate their time and experience in the fire service industry. The mean number of years in fire service was 32

with a range of 26-46 years. Four open-ended interview question were asked of each participant.

**Question 1: Historic Change.** In response to "what changes have they seen in the span of their careers," responses ranged from changes in attitudes and abilities of academy cadets who were often better educated, the impact of diversity, changes to the retirement system, accountability in the areas of safety, and changes in tactics and strategy with a wider range of emergency response situations. Their collective observations have been synthesized and included in Table 3.

**Table 3**

***Historic Changes in Fire Culture***

| Historic Changes in Fire Culture | |
|---|---|
| Observed Changes | Definition/Description |
| Work Ethic/Entitlement | Young people are feeling that they deserve something for which they have not worked for. Some students have no idea what it means to work hard.<br><br>Today the work ethic is push-button, adjusting from that as firefighter they are surprise at how hard this work is.<br><br>Attitudes have gone from selflessness in nature to a "what's in it for me." |
| Work Skills/Physical Ability/Experience | People are not physically prepared to do the job.<br><br>Student do not have the hand-eye-foot coordination and they come into our programs with no prior training in the trades or military. |
| Liability | Liability; in the 1987 the cities lost their insurance, they stopped the intern programs for people to get hands-on experience.<br><br>Getting the experience is difficult for students to qualify for the firefighter 1 certification. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Education | We are now seeing people with degrees and certifications – people entering today have much more education and certification and better critical thinking skills. This gives you an opportunity to draw on this new level of knowledge.<br><br>But just as many are also not very well prepared academically. Poor study habits and study skills. We are lucky to get someone over the 8th grade reading level. |
| Personal Safety | Safety is the biggest change trying to reduce firefighter injury and deaths. New generation is more safety conscious. The macho mentality has changed.<br><br>The flip side is people are using the safety issue to get out of an assignment!<br><br>Follow-up accident investigation demonstrates unsafe aggressive firefighting.<br><br>We need to take the extra tactical pause before we hurt somebody.<br><br>Smoking was very common in the fire service now it is not even allowed. |
| Diversity | The 1974 Consent Decree for hiring women and minorities has an impact on careers and on the fire service.<br><br>Agencies changed in training and the type of equipment, to keep in mind of the differences between the males and females.<br><br>Promotional opportunities for women were fast tracked. Cultural changes more open to race and gender—in the past they didn't get to be chief officers.<br><br>The fire a service used to be a men's club and men's world only- today we have more the cultural diversification—in the local fire departments you will find Armenian, Indian, African American, Hispanic, Asians alongside white firefighters.<br><br>There is a greater acceptance of African Americans and Gay's. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Family Orientation Changed | Yes, dramatic changes as a profession-- firefighters are now more professional, people are being held more accountable for their actions.<br><br>Fire station life was more fraternity like in the past and today it is more professional and much more accountable.<br><br>We were more of a family and now we are more individual. |
| Range of Emergency Types/Impact Tactics & Strategy | Tactics and Strategy has changed, if we know it is not a life safety issue—then it is not worth the risk of firefighter lives to save furniture, lamps, and books.<br><br>The way fires burn and the materials we must deal with are different today than 30 years ago.<br><br>How we deploy resources we are more knowledgeable with information and data from GIS and GPS in building fire stations.<br><br>It is difficult to keep-up with the disasters both natural and manmade. |
| Change in retirement system | The biggest change was in the retirement system to 57 years old instead of 50.<br><br>We now have more candidate coming in at their mid 30's. The older guy in mid-career change looking at the new kid, there is a generational gap between them, with more life experience then fewer problems in the fire house. |
| Technology | Trying to bridge or match old school with new school– in the old-school technology wasn't as prevalent—but we have had to change our behaviors.<br><br>Change is hard for old school, but new school is hard to change too! |

Not surprisingly, many of the changes that have occurred in the fire service since the 1970's mirror the same changes in American society. General attitudes and beliefs regarding diversity, personal health, safety, and education have each become much more informed. Technology has helped play a role in the dispersion of information that impact these attitudes and beliefs.

The question of change over time and the range of responses to it demonstrate the role and importance for understanding heritage and traditions in organizational culture. The impact societal changes have had on the fire service culture have been profound. The very construction and arrangement of fire stations from open style barracks and gang showers have given-way to semi-private sleeping areas and bathing facilities to accommodate female firefighters. Tools and equipment have also gotten lighter and easier to manage. A cotton jacketed hose has been replaced with lighter weight hypalon jacketed hose and the old brass couplings that went on that hose has been replaced with a lighter weight aluminum alloy. Every technical change and improvement in equipment provides accommodations for a wider range of people.

People have changed as well. Not only has the fire service had to change from a white, male-dominated occupational culture, but they have also had to accommodate minorities and women as mandated by the Consent Decree of 1973. Societal change is having a corresponding effect on the interrelationship of firefighters. The frat-house mentality of yesteryear is starting to give way to a higher level of professionalism and accountability. The changes in society and technology also lend themselves to individual isolation at the fire station, impacting the social fabric of firehouse life and team camaraderie.

**Question 2: The Values for Success.** The second interview question Fire Technology Directors were asked was to define: "What makes a person a successful firefighter?" Success was a dimension in the OCAI survey instrument (Quinn & Cameron, 2011) and, as stated by Deal and Kennedy (1983), "the essence of a company's philosophy for achieving success" (p. 21).

From the nine Fire Technology Directors interviewed, the top three values that they considered "Important" were tabulated and then grouped according the surfacing pattern of 1) inward focus of the individual, 2) an outer focus on the individual, 3) an inward focus on the fire community, and 4) an outer focus on the public and community that they serve. Each value in Table 4 has a corresponding definition or explanation.

**Table 4**

***Core-values for Success***

| **Core Values for Success** | | |
|---|---|---|
| Community Orientation | Co-Workers | Public |
| | Respect for Authority, Loyalty, Accountability, Team as Family, Teamwork | Customer Orientation, Compassion, Community Service, Trustworthy, Honesty |
| Individual Orientation | Excellence, Integrity, Humility, Drive, Commitment, Dedication, Initiative, Motivation | Technical Skills Physical Abilities Education, Big Picture |
| | Inward Focus | Outer Focus |

***Individual orientation/inward focus.*** "We do not teach character, we reveal it" was a quote from one Fire Technology Director. This participant continued, "We teach you skills and knowledge to be a firefighter, but you have to have the right attitude—motivation comes from within." The core-values for this quadrant are all about characteristics that needs to come from within a firefighter to be successful. Firefighters must have dedication and commitment as they strive for excellence as a core-value. Initiative, motivation and drive are not something that can be taught, it too must come from within the individual firefighter. To do the right thing even when no one is looking speaks to a firefighter's integrity. And no matter how good of firefighter that you are, that you also personify authentic humility is also a successful core-value.

***Individual orientation/outer focus****.* The core-values in this quadrant focus on what you can see firefighters doing and how they are doing it. Respect from one's peers comes when Fir Technology Directors see the core-values of being able to apply technical skills and having the personal strength and coordination to perform them optimally. Successful firefighters are those that you see always taking training classes and going to school; they are life-long learners.

The Big Picture as a successful value is embodied in firefighters who demonstrate forward vision and thinking. In the words of one Fire Technology Director, "Learning to be part of the future, 10-years ago we were getting into terrorism, 25-years ago we were getting into hazardous materials; the people who stepped-up then started looking at the future of the fire service."

***Community orientation/co-workers inward focus****.* The core-values in this quadrant concerns how a firefighter integrates themselves as part of the team and the

firehouse family successfully. The ability to work closely with one another and knowing not just your job but the jobs of those around you so that you can step-up when needed is descriptive of the core-value of teamwork. One Fire Technology Director described firefighting as a "team sport and coordinated effort." They went on to add "It is as simple as who is cooking dinner at the firehouse to what happens on the fire-ground. The emergency is dynamic and always changing. No one person can do it all by themselves, it takes a team effort." The core-value of a firefighter as family runs deeply through every level of fire service culture. If you wear the uniform and a have a badge you are instantly recognized as part of the family, no matter which agency you work for. When you wear the uniform, you do so with pride in who you are and what you represent. Successful firefighters in this quadrant are also accountable for their actions. If they make a mistake they own up to it. They hold each other accountable for their actions.

A value that draws from the military roots of the fire service is respect for authority. You may not like a person or leader but a successful core-value is that you respect the rank that person holds. This speaks to loyalty to one-self, the organization, and to the people that we serve. "Do right the first time and be loyal to the chain of command, your captain and your chief" is a sentiment echoed by another Fire Technology Director.

***Community orientation/ public outer focus.*** Recognition of the public they serve and the way that they serve them is the focus of this quadrant. The fact is that the public pays their salaries and has an expectation for a reasonable level of service. Several Fire Technology Directors echoed this theme. One specifically stated, "Generally, there are a lot of hostile and angry people out there, it is not easy to pick-up an old person who just

fell out of bed at 3 am, or a homeless person who calls at 2 am and has been sick for two weeks and wants you to give them medicine." Another stated, "While we serve the public, the public can be annoying, so you need to learn how to get along with people and not be an asshole." This is a 24-hour work environment and firefighting is a social job in a social environment.

A corresponding core-value is compassion. The Fire Technology Directors define this as caring for people. "That you work with a poor person or rich person with an equal level of care and that you can put aside any personal judgements, feelings or biases." The public has a lot of trust in firefighters so honesty and trustworthiness are also successful core-values.

Success is having a sense of the community that you serve. Two Fire Technology Directors mentioned this. One said, "Too many firefighters no longer work in the communities they serve, they work a couple of shifts then go to their homes and families in Lake Tahoe, Colorado, or Hawaii." We need to stay connected to our communities and the people that are our neighbors per one Fire Technology Director: "If you are not living in the community that you are working in, then you need to find a way to give back to the community the fire department represents."

**Question 3: Counter ideal values.** The third interview question asked: "How are firefighters unsuccessful?" The addressed counter-ideal values that Van Quaquebeke (2014) has been understudied. From this question, "the framework of what organizational life will be like, and will not be like for firefighters exists in their ability to contrast the espoused values against the counter-ideal values" (Van Quaquebeke, 2014, p. 211).

While it would seem intuitive that the exact opposite of the values that contribute success, would top the list for counter-ideal values, additional counter-ideal values surfaced as well. These counter-ideal values can be seen in Table 5. The counter-ideal values were placed in the same grid as the successful values and remarks from the Fire Technology Directors were coded and placed in a 4-quadrant grid with an inward and outer focuses on the individual and an inward and outer focus on the community of the fire service and the public.

**Table 5**

***Counter-Ideal Values***

| **Counter-Ideal Values** | | |
|---|---|---|
| Community Orientation | Co-Workers | Public |
| | Not Family Oriented, Freelancing, Mediocrity, Career Climbers, No Respect, Lazy, No Career Mindset | Intolerance |
| Individual Orientation | Isolated, No Integrity, Not Motivated, Negative Attitude, Inconsistent, No Drive | Social Media, No Physical Abilities, No Aptitude, No Self Improvement, No Continuing Ed., Won't Sacrifice, Injuries |
| | Inward Focus | Outer Focus |

***Individual orientation/inward focus.*** The counter-ideal values in this quadrant begins with negative attitude. These are firefighters who do everything right for the first 365 days to pass their probationary period and then on day 366 head for the lounge chairs in the day-room and do nothing but complain. Per the Fire Technology Directors, these

are people who do not grow personally or professionally. One stated, “They may have a year or two on the job, but in their own mind they have 25-yers of experience.” These firefighters have no drive or ambition and are not self-motivated to grow beyond where they are at. All of which calls into question their personal integrity. Because of the historic changes in demographics and fire station design, unsuccessful firefighters now have a personal space at the fire station where they can isolate themselves and focus on their electronic social network. Social media, per one Fire Technology Director, allows firefighters to “be the center of their own universe creating a hyper competitive struggle for attention.” Isolation in this fashion, by not sharing meals and hearing stories of past successes and failures, further alienates them from the rest of their team. One participant stated, “In some ways, what we are trying to achieve in a firefighter candidate; social media is working against us.”

***Individual orientation/outer focus.*** In this quadrant, Fire Technology Directors see people who do not have the aptitude to be in the firefighting profession as evidenced in their lack of physical abilities in terms of strength and coordination. The lack of physical ability increases the opportunity for injuries to themselves and potentially others around them. One individual stated, “We are seeing a trend with more candidates who have pre-existing health conditions, like insulin dependent diabetics.”

For other unsuccessful firefighters, the sheer lack of self-motivation or self-improvement to learn is a demonstration (in the eyes of the Fire Technology Directors) when firefighters are there for a paycheck and not for their department their team. There is a generational issue in that the pre-employment people are not as willing to sacrifice their time and family to be successful. According to one director, “When getting ready

for a test or for promotion, they ask what do they need to know? The answer is everything!" The people who are settling for mediocre and just getting by are not as successful as those who continue to educate themselves. Learning helps you make yourself better.

***Community orientation/inner focus co-workers.*** "They lack up-brining," said one director. Not being family/team orientated is at the top of this quadrant. This value surfaces for many Fire Technology Directors. One participant stated,

> *"In today's world, the kids come from broken homes, they were raised by their single mom who worked fulltime, and these kids have issues with male authority and they are socially deficient. They are so used to interacting with their social media they cannot look you eye-to-eye."*

Without respect for authority they do not fit into the culture. The breakdown of the family unit has had an impact on the fire service in that they do not associate team as family as opposed to people being there to just do a job. They see a team being organized to meet an objective but not how to support other people. This realizes itself on the training or fire ground when they are just doing their job and not looking out for their team members. Understanding technology is great but understanding fire command, basic firefighting, and how the individual fits into the organization appears to be lacking. The ability to work closely with others, achieve an objective, keep an open mind in the process, and be flexible are important skills that the directors did not see.

The importance of teamwork was echoed by several Fire Technology Directors; "To be goal orientated in the fire department is all about management by objectives. If everybody does not achieve the task than the objective falls apart." Freelancing firefighters are those who feel that they have the best idea for a solution when given an

assignment but when you go and check on them and they are doing something completely different. “They have a wrong attitude as if they know everything.” These firefighters are not seen as positive members of the team. They bring the whole company down when everyone is pulling their weight and they are not. “Firefighters who settle for mediocre and just getting by are not as successful as those who continue to develop themselves; learning helps make you better.” There is a lot of procrastination; if you keep putting things off you won’t be successful. “Lazy firefighters are unwilling to put in the work to succeed.” The inability to work together in small groups effects your success. Your shift is your family. You must be able to work well in close conditions. “The unwillingness to be part of the tribe - preferring to be alone and isolated in contrast to being included with others is a mark of the unsuccessful firefighters,” remarked on Fire Technology Director.

Successful firefighters, as mentioned by the Fire Technology Directors, “have a career mindset that this is your chosen career, this is what you are committed to do. We are not seeing this as much today.” They also point out a flip-side to career dedication for those firefighters who are overly ambitious. One director claimed, “Career climbers who move around and promote quickly, they are not on the job and getting the experience they need before they are already looking for the next opportunity. When you look at their applications you ask why did you move around so much?” The unsuccessful candidates have a character flaw in that they are not willing to fit in to the organization itself. When they leave the fire academy they do not fit into the role of a firefighter because they have unreal expectations. For example, they do not realize that going out on a strike team means being away from home for extended periods of time. Most think it is all glory and

they are not willing to work through the mundane aspects of the job. Their interpretation of being a firefighter is different from working in the fire station and what it is like.

***Community orientation/outer focus on the public.*** There was no specific counter-ideal value associated with working with the public. However, being tolerant of people no matter social status or condition was a successful core-value. In that many Fire Technology Directors expressed that the opposite of the successful values would be the standard for unsuccessful, intolerance then would be the mark of an unsuccessful firefighter. This could be defined as judgmental, biased, rude and disrespectful to the public they serve.

**Question 4: Sharing Philosophies.** The fourth question asked Fire Technology Directors if they share their philosophies of success with instructional staff and students. The collective answers were statements such as "They all hear it!" and "Constantly, all the time." One director mentioned, "There is not a day that goes by that something, that we just talked about in this interview, hasn't come up in the fire academy." This is shared from the beginning in their orientation and formally passed on to the students. "As I walk into the classroom, I hear the faculty talking about the same things,' per several Fire Technology Directors." "We have a lot of contact with the students and we talk about a lot of stuff. That is why we feel so strongly about these philosophies, because we live it." Sometimes students bring up questions to their instructors and responses were like this, per one director: "With life experiences or something that the students bring up in class we are very opened minded in sharing our thoughts and philosophies. We are trying to bridge old-school and new-school mentalities." "We want to think that 100% of what we say is getting through to them. The feedback comes when someone gets hired

out of our academy." "The local fire chiefs and training officers have a lot of respect for the college training program."

"The faculty is aware of my philosophy and how much we are influencing the next generation of firefighters," one Fire Technology Director said. "They see me as a positive role model in terms of work ethic." They each observed that the faculty is from their own generation and already feel much as they do. One explained, "We have talked about this stuff and shake our heads and shrug our shoulders at the things we hear and see."

**Summary**

The responses to the ethnographic interview questions and results of the OCAI survey (Quinn & Cameron, 2011) provide evidence of an occupational culture that is unique to California Fire Technology Directors. This data also identifies areas for reinforcing areas of their culture and supports several key recommendations identified in Chapter 5.

# CHAPTER 5

## Discussion

The data collected from the ethnographic interviews demonstrates that there is indeed a pattern of basic assumptions and understanding that is universally shared by the Fire Technology Directors. What they have collectively learned, in terms of what it takes to be a successful firefighter, in the span of their careers is the fount of knowledge necessary for them to solve their problems of adaption to the environment and their integration within the fire service culture. These same assumptions, beliefs, and values are now being taught and passed along to the next generation.

The interviews also collected information regarding counter-ideal values. Here again, experience in their careers helped define people who have been considered by their peers as unsuccessful. The values for success and alongside the counter-ideal values completes the frame of what makes a successful firefighter and provides a glimpse of what life might be like working as a firefighter.

The Fire Technology Directors are socializing the next generation on how to perceive, think, and feel in relation to being a successful firefighter. From the consistent responses in Table 4 regarding successful values and Table 5 in terms of counter-ideal values along with the data from reported for the OCAI surveys (Quinn & Cameron, 2011), the answer to the first research question is yes, Fire Technology Directors can be defined as a subgroup within the occupational culture of the fire service industry.

The second research questions asked: “What are the shared core-values and beliefs of Fire Technology Directors?” This information was gleaned from both the OCAI survey (Quinn & Cameron, 2011) and in the ethnographic interviews. Content

analysis of the common themes revealed in the interviews provided both values for success and counter-intuitive values. The salient core-values that emerged from this data is; a firefighter who integrates themselves to the firefighter culture, family, and team and is tolerant with the public they serve, and is committed to good customer service. The successful firefighter acts as if they are inspired from within, and they can demonstrate their talent in technical skills and abilities. Conversely, the unsuccessful firefighter is isolated from his team and fire family, acts intolerantly towards the public they serve, are unmotivated, and weak and/or uncoordinated. The values for success are shown above the inverse counter-ideal values (in red) in Table 6.

**Table 6.**

***Core-values, California Fire Technology Directors***

| **Fire Technology Directors Core-Values** | | |
|---|---|---|
| | **Co-Workers** | **Public** |
| **Community Orientation** | **Integrated**<br>**Isolated** | **Tolerant**<br>**Intolerant** |
| **Individual Orientation** | **Inspired**<br>**Unmotivated** | **Talented**<br>**Weak/Uncoordinated** |
| | **Inward Focus** | **Outer Focus** |

The OCAI survey (Quinn & Cameron, 2011) validated the interview results with a focus on people, teamwork, and a sense of family. The OCAI survey (Quinn &

Cameron, 2011) also helped to identify the unique identity of Fire Technology Directors who, in different colleges, appear to share the same problems of adaptation in their highly regulated and hierarchical environments to achieve a level of integration within their colleges, staff, and students.

The answer to the third research question: "To what extent, if any, is the culture of the California Fire Technology training programs aligned to the perceived future needs of the fire service industry?" is inconclusive. There is not enough data regarding the future needs of the fire service. A more extensive study would need to be made to determine if the Fire Technology Directors are responding accordingly.

There is evidence that the Fire Technology Directors recognize the shift in personal values for a new generation of firefighter candidates. They are responding to this challenge by adjusting their teaching styles and techniques to accommodate the sensitivities of a new technologically savvy, highly educated, socially isolated and technically deficient generation. The data collected in this study is consistent with the major themes of both positive traits and attitudes of firefighters and the documentation of risky behaviors and decision making (IAFC, 2015). Importantly, the IAFC (2015) report also documents the negative behaviors and attitudes that make change in the fire service so difficult.

Clearly the Fire Technology Directors recognize their responsibility to share their philosophies and values with both their students and faculties. Most of the faculty come from the same place of experience and understanding as their Fire Technology Director and both echo and reinforce the same beliefs and values.

From the OCAI survey (Quinn & Cameron, 2011) it is obvious that the Fire Technology Directors want to stay firmly imbedded in Clan culture. However, they are also looking toward movement toward a preferred Adhocracy culture with less emphasis on Hierarchical and Market cultures. It is obvious that the Fire Technology Directors understand their role in properly preparing young people for a career in the fire service that not only advances their technical knowledge, skills, and abilities, but also the social mindset that allows them to do so successfully.

**Limitations of the Study**

This study on cultural values and beliefs is limited to the target group of 42 Fire Technology Directors at the community colleges around the state of California. The response of 12 surveys and nine interviews is a small sample that represents approximately 25% of the target population. A follow-up study on how many of these beliefs and values are internalized by first year firefighters would be an excellent companion to the current study. Such a study would demonstrate to the Fire Technology Directors what parts of fire service culture is being passed on to the next generation. Additional research or future studies that collect data on observable behavior and artifacts would provide an opportunity to examine the role of heritage and tradition in the maintenance of occupational cultures.

Another limitation to this study is in objectivity. The researcher himself has been in the fire service for over 40 years. Working closely with the Fire Technology Directors for the last decade would suggest that a bias of opinions and ideas color this study. Every effort was made to collect the data objectively but in the interpretation of this data is where this bias can surface.

**Recommendations**

The limitations of this study and the study itself point towards areas for future work and research regarding the socialization of new firefighter candidates. There is an opportunity for a fire academy staff development and training on "managing values." Such a training program would provide information on how to integrate individual values of firefighter candidates to those of the fire service through objective feedback. The training would include information on maintaining the value system by creating new contexts with the interpretation of daily activities in terms of organizational values. In this way, operational efficiencies and effectiveness can be addressed from new context around the cultural DNA of the fire service. Furthermore, in support of the Fire Technology Directors and Instructors socializing young people into the fire service, there appears to be a need to provide some level of training for firefighter cadets on what it means to be part of the fire service family and to be part of a dedicated team. Just as remedial training is provided by many colleges in the areas of Math and English, a Social Skills class may better prepare firefighter cadets for a life in the fire service successfully. One final suggestion involved settling the incongruence within the dimension of Organizational Glue noted in the OCAI survey (Quinn & Cameron, 2011). This would suggest that the Fire Technology Directors should address areas of loyalty and trust within each of their parent organizations. There appears to be a strong desire in this dimension to pull away from the formality and structure of the control agencies and to develop the latitude for experimentation and innovation to differentiate and one fire academy from another.

**Conclusion**

The question regarding the core-values, beliefs, and assumptions of Fire Technology Directors, as they socialize the next generation into the fire service and emergency service, sprang from the idea that the fire service industry is resistant to change. In the exploration of Fire Technology Directors values and beliefs it is obvious that they are trying to imprint a time-honored value system on a generation that does not share their same points of reference, experience, or interests.

From the data collected, the values that the Fire Technology Directors communicate are firmly and deeply rooted in the past. In that, the very nature of culture insures group survival; culture is naturally resistant to change. The Fire Technology Directors have an expectation that the young recruits need to change and conform to the norms of fire service culture. This is being accomplished without fully appreciating how society has started to unravel the fabric of everyday life in the firehouse. For these fire officers, their fire service career is more than a job - it is a lifestyle.

For the newest firefighters, becoming a firefighter is a job that supports their lifestyle. New fire recruits do not have the same point of reference for "family" as imagined by 50-year old fire officers who grew-up on re-runs of Leave-it-to Beaver and Mayberry RFD. The physical changes to fire station design to accommodate and attract more females to the fire service is occurring at the same time the growth in use of social media allows young firefighters to stay connected to their personal network and to retreat into themselves. This generation of firefighters now have a place within the fire station to isolate themselves that they did not have decades ago. New recruits are reportedly feeling

out-of-place and uncomfortable in the setting of a traditional family that older firefighters identify with. The coping mechanism used by younger firefighters is to withdraw.

The process of isolation and eventual alienation from their fire family and crew is potentially dangerous, in that the lessons of survival are explained in the tradition of oral histories shared around the kitchen table and in the training classroom. In that, “what you know” and “what you know how to do” is the foundation from which trust is made among firefighting co-workers. Isolated team members erode that level of trust by not fully participating in fire station life.

The current study amplifies the need to consciously address the issue of fire service traditions in the wake of social and technological progress. There is an expectation to maintain a level of service our communities have come to expect, while at the same time maintain the level of team camaraderie that engenders the trust among firefighters needed for their own survival. Revolutionary change is about to catch-up with the fire service in this new generation of firefighters. The question remains how is the fire service industry going to respond and adapt their traditions to social and technological progress.

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# Appendix A

## Interview Questionnaire Values & Beliefs Example

INTERVIEW QUESTIONAIRE VALUES & BELIEFS

| DOMINANCE | RICHNESS | IMPORTANCE |
|---|---|---|
| Q 1: How long have you been associated with the fire service and in that time, have you seen any change in firefighter behaviors? | | |
| | 30 years started at 16 as a fire cadet | |
| | I separate the old school from the new school | |
| | I am old-school this-- new generation is what can you do for me. Trying to bridge or match old school with new school –where there is instant gratification; "I want to know now." Looking at this at as whole—in the old-school technology wasn't prevalent—but we have had to change our behaviors. We are learning to catch up with the technology and the great struggle for the old-school. It is hard to change old -school. The new generation is also slow to approach to change. | |
| | Lack of studying in the new generation they expect the instructors to give them all the information that they need. They don't want to put the hard work into learning. | |
| Q 2: What makes a person a successful firefighter? | | |
| Open Mindedness | Must have an open mind, be impressionable on your trait as work ethic, be the right candidate for the job, get along with other personnel. How to get a job by selling yourself—this is something that they must do. The hard work and the dedication and the willingness to put the hard work in together. | 4 |
| Work Ethic | Be to work on time—I work from sunup to sundown we didn't go home that until the job was done. Some cadets pick-up job applications but don't bring them back, they don't follow-through. Can be changed by the management at the top be firm but fair—people will change their behavior towards that. | 1 |
| Dedication- | Number one be a member of the community—if you are not living in the area you are | 2 |