
Leadership and Management in the Fire Service

Introduction

This assignment will examine key theories on leadership and management, including performance management and culture within my Service, Humberside Fire and Rescue Service (HFRS) and Avon Fire and Rescue Service (AFRS).

Both organisations have very similar structures (see Appendix 1) and are classified by DCLG as Shire Brigades which are in the same family comparison group, and have similar fire authority governance, areas of responsibility and organisational structures.

During the ongoing period of austerity both Services are subject to significant organisational changes and are driving forward with modern, adaptive management structures. Both organisations have reduced their establishments substantially.

HFRS and AFRS set out their priorities and objectives within public facing consultation documents. These documents present clearly how each Service will deliver its services in a clear and transparent way detailing finances, resources, emergency response and prevention activities.

I will show significant findings from my research highlighting contrasting leadership and management styles in both organisations and make recommendations for a proposed business case change.

In 2015 due to the replacement of its Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) Avon underwent a bruising period of organisational governance and scrutiny. There have been internal cultural and independent audits and external Her Majesties Inspectorate of Constabularies and Fire and Rescue Service (HMICFRS) and independent audits. The subsequent public scrutiny has led to major organisational changes to governance, leadership and management system.

Organisational Leadership

The leadership spectrum between both organisations follows the UK fire and rescue serviced joint national guidance with defined strategic, operational and tactical levels of leadership being utilised at the different levels of the organisation. See Appendix 1.

Theory 1 X & Y Theory

Social psychologist (McGregor, 1960) wrote, *The Human Side of Enterprise*, which developed two contrasting theories explaining how managers' beliefs about what motivates their people could affect their management style and influence them to use either an authoritarian (Theory X) and participative (Theory Y) style.

Within the article *Life cycle theory of leadership* (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969) arrived at the conclusion that the behaviour of a leader stems from two criteria: people orientation (concern for

people) and task orientation (concern for production). In their Situational Leadership Model, they combined these two criteria that linked leadership styles to situations. Effective leadership varies, not only with the person or group that is being influenced, but it also depends on the task, job, or function that needs accomplishing.

In 2015 the CFO of Avon was suspended. Allegations of bullying, fiscal mismanagement, poor planning resulted in an intense and ongoing scrutiny of the Service. The CFO and FRA leadership demonstrated Theory X tendencies with little advice from other senior officers or fire authority oversight. Independent reports criticised the culture within Avon and condemned the flawed judgments made.

The management style was autocratic, with strict work rules, policies and rules with punishment and harassment used to motivate team members. The power culture and influence that emanated from the CFO could be conceived as a spider's web with decisions taken on the balance of influence. (O'Donovan, 1994).

The FRA did not have a standing constitution or willingness to direct and manage the situation. The CFO had been re-employed after retirement into a situation described as 'an old boys club' in a scathing report whilst the Service struggled with low morale, poor motivation and dismal organisational performance reports

(Buckman, 2018) wrote "Toxic leaders can exist at all levels of fire service leadership. They create an unpleasant work environment because of their attitude towards others and everything else." They may use dysfunctional behaviours to deceive, attack or unfairly punish others to get what they want. This cultural process can quickly become the 'norm' for an organisation and permeate along the leadership spectrum.

HFRS senior management are working in a Theory Y leadership style. The CFO has also recently retired and been re-employed however he and Humberside FRA have a very participative, democratic, and authentic management style. The interface between the SLT and the Fire Authority has an open transparent process but works within a clearly defined roles and constitution. The CFO leads debate, allowing contribution and implementing the agreed plans in a way in which contributors are valued for their skills and eager to share their knowledge and have time and resources to allow debate and develop ideas and implement action plans.

Theory 2 – Transactional Leadership

Transactional leadership, also known as managerial leadership, focuses on the role of supervision, organization and group performance. This theory of leadership was first described in by sociologist Max Weber, and further explored by Bernard M. Bass in the early 1980s.

- People are motivated by reward and punishment.
- Social systems work best with a clear chain of command.
- When people have agreed to do a job, a part of the deal is that they cede all authority to their manager.
- The prime purpose of a subordinate is to do what their manager tells them to do.

Both Humberside and Avon use transactional styles of leadership.

Business Case Proposal – The Distributed Leadership Model

(Ancona et al., 2007), states “Corporations have been becoming less hierarchical and more collaborative for decades”. She developed a new leadership model which argues that there is no such thing as a complete leader and demonstrates a distributed leadership framework which views leadership as a set of four capabilities:

- sensemaking (understanding the context in which a company and its people operate),
- relating (building relationships within and across organizations),
- visioning (creating a compelling picture of the future), and
- inventing (developing new ways to achieve the vision).

The concept is that the incomplete leader differs from an incompetent leader because they are not the mythical, flawless, person at the top of the organisation. They know their limitations and strengths and how to offset their weakness using the capabilities within the distributed leadership model to direct the problem to the best group, or individual to achieve the task.

Management systems

In its most simplistic form management is a plan which defines goals and creates a pathway to achieve the organisational goals. With goals set the leadership style is then used to establish targets, execute the plan and evaluate the desired objectives throughout the process. Managers need to ensure the objectives are produced proficiently and effectively with staff working towards clearly goals. To achieve effective management does not rely on character, personality or charisma but utilises management systems to achieve successes.

Avon and Humberside Fire & Rescue Services are very similar in the organisational structure; each now produces Integrated Risk Management Plans, Strategic Plans Etc. and their organisational management systems now clearly align to three key management theories.

Theory 1. Fayol’s principles of management

Henri Fayol's management theory (Fayol, 1916) is a simple model of how management interacts with personnel. Fayol's theory covers concepts broadly and almost any business can utilise the tools to productively managing staff.

Figure 2 FAYOL’S 14 Principals of Management Source www.toolshero.com

The implementation of these strategic rules is well suited to the hierarchical and transactional based structures of the Fire Service. They are useful comprehensive tools for focusing on key administrative management tasks such as forecasting, planning, process management, organisation management, decision-making, coordination and control and although they are obvious, many of these tools are still used in current management within Humberside and Avon.

It is a very archaic inward-looking management model which does not consider external factors such as customer’s needs.

Theory 2. Webers ‘Bureaucratic Management Theory’;

with a pyramid style hierarchy clearly applying to both Avon and to Humberside Fire and Rescue Service; where the individuals in the higher positions supervised those in the lower positions with clear lines of authority, job descriptions and operating policies relating to the relevant levels of the leadership spectrum. The hierarchical structure of the bureaucracy creates a conforming structure for the workforce to adhere and follow.

Max Webber, defines these hierarchical structures as defined as having:

- Clear lines of authority
- Clear lines of hierarchy
- Defined operating policies
- Defined Job Descriptions
- Clear communication systems

Strengths and Weaknesses

Within Avon the management style broke down at the interface between the principal officers and the Fire and Rescue Authority. Major decision-making by principal officers went unchallenged and unscrutinised. The stake-holder committee was overly bureaucratic and politically indecisive in implementing control measures and slow to counter criticism. Without a guiding constitution or independent examination the organisation did not have any rules to scrutinise decision-making which ultimately limited its effectiveness.

One solution was the PCC type model suggested by (May, 2016) during her speech on fire reform within the Fire Service. Their introduction may have offered independent oversight and direction. (Murphy, 2016) considered that their introduction should meet six clear criteria; Community led needs and priorities not national agendas, Working together with ongoing collaboration between the emergency services, Governance and responsibility for strategic oversight and direction, Financial evaluation to demonstrate value for money, particularly in the current era of austerity, clear public consultation process and, Public Assurance via an independent process. If the PCC been in existence sooner Avon may have had clearer management and leadership.

Weber believed that a well-managed organisation required both a hierarchical structure and clear values and rules and that if the management wants to make real change in an organisation it must trust those below them and give them the authority to make improvements, and, if necessary, make mistakes.

Humberside Fire Authority, of its own violation, has a formal constitution which it adheres to and has created a Governance Audit and Scrutiny (GAS) Committee made up of seven independent co-opted and non-political members (GAS Committee, 2018) whose role is to scrutinise the fiscal, leadership and executive decisions made by Humberside Fire Authority and its Strategic Leadership Team in key areas (HFRS, 2019).

Business Case Proposal - Contingency Theory

Both organisations work in a balanced state between operational and non-operational environments. Management styles in each environment may vary depending on the situation.

For example during emergency incidents, the leader will tend to lean towards 'concern for production' and typically be more autocratic in style whereas during non-operational situations they may typically lean more towards 'concern for people' and be more participative in their leadership style (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969). This management style is typically demonstrated at the tactical/operational end of the leadership spectrum.

Governance systems

Fire Service modernisation has been the focus of many reports (Bain, 2002) and (Thomas, 2015) on the modernisation of the Fire Service. (Knight, 2013) within "Facing the future" proposed a management model which would clarify accountability and offer greater visibility to the public.

With the loss of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in 2012 the role of governance reverted to Peer Reviews until the Home Secretary (May, 2016) indicated her intention to introduce a new oversight of the fire service by empowering police and crime commissioners.

Theresa May, emphasized that the peer reviews were not as 'critical' of each other as their name applied. (Farrell, 2018) reinforces this view with her arguments Fire Service governance is still unclear and that the stakeholder model does not operate effectively.

May went on to state that local services were hampered by bureaucratic control, in which targets drove confusion and perverse outcomes, and taxpayers' money was wasted.

In 2017 an independent scrutineer, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) was tasked with scrutinising Fire Service governance.

Weakness.

A key issue with all audits and review as a management tool are, by their very nature, invasive and which create another layer of bureaucracy. Avon are under a period of intense scrutiny by HMICFRS and are reacting because of poor governance and cultural issues. Humberside has created a dedicated department which focuses purely on collating and providing evidence to meet HMICFRS examination process to prevent an escalating audit process.

Guilfoyle asserts that applying private sector business models to the public sector often creates unintended expenditure and effort whilst the consequences damage productivity and morale. Despite this experience most reform programmes and in style management practices seek to enforce approaches that are overly demanding on the organisation.

Both organisations are target led (Guilfoyle) with escalating audits, if they score poorly, and deescalating reviews if they score well.

Another key question which could be argued against the stakeholder model of governance is how a Fire Authority can both lead an organisation and scrutinise it. Within Humberside the Fire Authority have appointed a GAS which are independent of both the Service and Authority and whose mandate is to scrutinise the Services against its finances, plans and outcomes.

Culture ques to change management

Within Lewin's (1951) Change management model; is 'the process of continually renewing an organisations direction, structure and capabilities to serve the ever-changing needs of external and internal customers'. for the process to be initiated then the change has been adopted or forced upon an organisation to create the impetus for change.

The model states that for an organisation to change it must go through the three stages of change management

1. Unfreezing -
2. Movement
3. Refreezing

Balogun and Hope Hailey (2004) stated that any change made during the movement phase normally had a failure rate of approximately 70% within all change programmes undertaken. Bad habits and poor cultures are hard to remove once embedded within an organisation.

Within the critical FRA/FRS interface I have considering the historic events which Avon FRA has found itself having to react to. Clearly the situation has forced the organisation into a change process which they didn't initially want to proceed with.

The process is ongoing with AVON currently operating in the 'UNFREEZING' mode whilst HUMBERSIDE is working in the 'FREEZING' mode.

Avon and Humberside Comparison

Avon was slow to acknowledge the need to plan – with resistance to the implementation of IRMP; their lack of forward thinking and financial planning highlighted during the independent inspection; peer reviews and Tranche1 HMICFRS reports. Whilst slow to acknowledge the issue AVON now has a clear action plan process in place

Governance – organisational comparisons

Within Avon; it was the interface between their fire authority and the SLT that failed; resulting in the suspension of members of the team in 2015. An Independent Home Office inspection of the Service published in 2017, identifying a clear failure in the governance and organisational scrutiny. There were financial irregularities, a culture of intimation and poor planning endemic within the Fire Authority and SLT.

Subsequently there has been a prolonged inspection regime bringing Avon under intense scrutiny, diverting organisational energy and cost in terms of preparation and auditing. In July 2017, the Fire Authority Chair, Cllr Donald Davis responded to the independent report, stating, "We have wasted money, we have wasted effort, we need to concentrate on keeping the people of Avon safe."

Humberside has a strong relationship of trust between its fire authority and its strategic leadership team. Debate is healthy and a culture of trust is strongly displayed by its

membership. External audits critique many areas of the Service; its leadership strategy for middle managers, its expensive cost in comparison to other fire and rescue services, its lack of diversity in terms of BAME but its governance and senior management are not under scrutiny.

Conclusions

The similarities between both organisations is clear. The leadership styles of both organisations at the coal face (the tactical and operational levels of the leadership spectrum are clearly aligned and follow national processes and stratagems.

At the strategic level and at the interface between SLT and each FRA there are clear differences in the leadership and management journeys both organisations have been travelling on.

Avon - rough ride... forming stage

- Humberside – steady ride - ... stage
- Both organisations are similar = CFO's who retired and came back; but different leadership styles
- Blacksell – participative and democratic style with the support of his SLT and FRA
- Autocratic and confrontational leadership style with

Most organisational leaderships breakdown at the human interface; the failure of these cultural values lead to interruption of the behavioural factors which create friction, anxiety, resentment or even communication failure.

Under the guise of governance and accountability, audits and reviews create additional factors including the cost of inspections, preparation time and the subsequent demoralisation of the leadership team and the workforce which creates further ripples in inspection regime culture.

Managed well the system of inspection can change the focus within an organisation by learning how an organisation is structured, what the organisation needs, what it wants and thus allowing it to focus on a strategy which it can then plan and implement. This view is reinforced by (Senge, 1990) who advocates a system thinking based methodology through inter-related activities would improve communication and vision; leading to a better view of people's behaviour. (Sinek, 2017), also states that trust and openness broaden behaviour," Empathy would be injected into the company and trust would be the new standard".