

**Group Dynamics & Power Structures:  
Toward a Greater Understanding of the  
*Line-Staff* Relationship  
Within the Austin Fire Department**

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# Chapter One

## *Introduction*

"Did you want to kill him Buck?"

"Well, I bet I did."

"What did he do to you?"

"Him, he never done nothing to me?"

"Well, then, what did you want to kill him for?"

"Why, nothing--only it's on account of the feud."

"What was the trouble about, Buck?--land?"

"I reckon maybe--I don't know...."

Huckleberry to Buck; Mark Twain

In Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, in response to Huckleberry's question, Buck can't remember why the Grangerford and Shepherdson families are feuding. With a perplexed look, Buck simply replies, "I don't know...." Presumably, the Grangerford and Shepherdsons have been fighting for so long, nobody can remember why -- nor, we are led to believe, does anybody really care. Apparently, the feud between the two families has taken on a life of its own. But the inquisitive side of us wonders...*what is behind the conflict...why are the families fighting?* Obviously, this is the question that Twain wants us to ask. Indeed, Twain's feuding families provide both graphic and tragic example of the insidious power of causality...of cause/effect run amok. In the conflict between the Grangerfords and the Shepherdsons, the participants' behavior has become habit: they've always been fighting so they simply continue to fight. Nobody even asks *why* anymore.

Twain's use of the feuding families is compelling, and makes one wonder to what extent social behavior itself is the product of habitual patterns and unconscious social dynamics. Indeed, to what extent is social *conflict* the product of behavioral norms and habits? While this question -- in its ultimate extrapolation -- runs head-long into the perennial debate between determinism and free will, it nevertheless has practical applications in every day life. In particular, is social behavior rational and based on



objective assessments of circumstances? Or, is social behavior the product of a synergistic dysfunction that participants, unwittingly, perpetuate? Like the self-reinforcing feud between the Grangerfords and the Shepherdsons, is conflict promoted through habitual forms of behavior that, over time, become structured into routine?

This is an interesting question that should hold a place of importance in the minds of public administrators. While this question may seem overly philosophical, when distilled, it presents the notion of *root causes*. For the Public Administrator, root causes suggest a possible explanation behind organizational behavior -- a response to that ever-present question, "What's going on here anyway?" For an organization in conflict, identification of root causes may reveal the structural or social conditions behind dysfunctional organizational behavior. Or, an identification of root causes may direct the inquisitive public administrator toward alternative practices. At the least, an exploration of root causes to organizational behavior may reveal new and unique understandings into the dynamics of organizational life.

This research proposes to examine root causes: to explore the fundamental question, "What's going on here anyway?" The purpose of this exploration into the dynamics of the Line-Staff relationship within the Austin Fire Department is to examine potential root causes to organizational behavior -- to identify what's going on between the two organizational groups of Line and Staff. Specifically, this research intends to explore the nature of the Line-Staff relationship within the context of *group dynamics* and *power structures*. It is expected that this relationship will be characterized by conflict.

### *Caveat*

It should be noted that this research treads into heretofore uncharted territory within the fire service literature. While there is a wealth of academic effort directed toward organizational behavior, there are no studies in the traditional literature which explore the dynamics between Line and Staff as functional groups within fire service organizations.

This research, therefore, is original and, de facto, subject to all the pitfalls and errors of any budding inquiry. Many initial presuppositions directed this study during its conceptual phase and the entire exploration reflects these initial premises. Therefore, this research takes an intelligent shot in the near-dark at a moving target in an attempt to describe organizational phenomena. At best, this research will alert public administrators toward functional and social phenomena which serve as engines of conflict between organizational groups. At a minimum, this research will provide greater understanding of the root causes of conflict which interplay on organizational behavior within the Austin Fire Department, thus taking us a healthy leap beyond Buck's bewildered response of, "I don't know....," when someone asks us, "What's the trouble about?"

### *Preview of the Chapters*

In **Chapter Two** the reader is introduced to the structuration criteria which define Line and Staff within the Fire Service. The origins of the presumed conflict between the functional groups of Line and Staff within the AFD is presented and the notion of *conflict* as it relates to the AFD is supported. In **Chapter Three**, the relevant literature which supports the conceptual framework for the inquiry is examined in detail. Specific attention is directed toward the literature on *Organizational Culture, Group Dynamics, and Power Structures*. Also, Chapter Three introduces the study's conceptual framework. The working hypotheses for the study are introduced and their links to the relevant literature are demonstrated. **Chapter Four** introduces the research method used in the study; links between operationalization indicators and the literature are demonstrated. The data collection tools utilized for the inquiry are discussed along with their relative merits. In **Chapter Five**, the City of Austin and the Austin Fire Department are presented; demographic, organizational and structural information on the department are discussed as are the specific structuration criteria for the categorization of Line and Staff within the AFD. Organizational dynamics which define the department and its current status within the

industry are presented. In **Chapter Six**, a narrative and simple statistical discussion of the results of the research are presented and preliminary conclusions are drawn from the data. Finally, **Chapter Seven** attempts to make sense of the data and reveal its importance to the Austin Fire Department in particular and public administration in general. This chapter examines the relevance of the study in relation to the statistical findings and the conceptual framework designed for the study. Weakness and limitations of the study along with recommendations for future research are presented.

## Chapter Two

### *Statement of the Problem: "What's the trouble about..?"*

*"What's a feud?"*

*"Why, where was you raised? Don't you know what a feud is?"*

*"Never heard of it before--tell me about it."*

*--Huckleberry Finn*

*--Twain*

*"...I guarantee if you were to split us up, and if we just take sides,*

*this guy here he was having a fight with an Operations guy,*

*and your a Staff guy, Staff is going to back you, whereas*

*Operations is going to back Operations.*

*It's just two different type people..."*

*-- AFD Staff Officer*

*Research Focus Group*

Fire Service organizations provide a unique laboratory for studies into public administration. Perhaps the quintessential public institution, fire departments are charged with a civic responsibility that moves well beyond common notions of "governance." Charged with the heady responsibility of *public safety*, fire department personnel, in the span of a typical day, can be asked to field-deliver a newborn infant, enter a runaway fire in search of a missing occupant, cut a trapped driver out of a wrecked vehicle, assist an elderly citizen with a household chore or even remove a cat or two from a sprawling oak tree. Moreover, modern fire departments provide a multitude of non-emergency services such as plans-review for new structures, fire and arson investigation, fire code enforcement, hazardous materials permitting, public education and numerous forms of hazard intervention. Few public organizations can boast such a broad repertoire of services. Indeed, the expansive nature of the fire service mission -- *to protect life and property* -- allows for such sweeping interpretations as to the specific role of a fire department that modern trends are toward *renaming* them to fit with realities. In contemporary vernacular, fire departments are no longer considered "fire" departments, but

rather “safety” organizations. Modern, urban fire departments offer a broad menu of safety services to their publics.<sup>1</sup>

This dynamism in service delivery makes for interesting public administration and numerous traditions have evolved over the years to aid fire service administrators in managing the resultant complexity. Perhaps the most crosscutting tradition in fire service administration can be found in organizational structure. (NFPA, 1997) The prototype fire service organization has evolved into a quasi-military agency that possesses rigid lines of authority and maintains comprehensive standard procedures. The modern fire department models the Weberian bureaucracy: limited spans of control, hierarchical organizational structures, centralized authority and pseudo-autocratic styles. Furthermore, the two functional categorizations of Line and Staff and the criteria supporting their division is central to the fire service organization’s prototype structure. (NFPA, 1997)

### *Line*

Since professional fire departments were originally structured around a 24 hour emergency response mission, great tradition dictates the structure of the typical “response” arm of the fire service.<sup>2</sup> Remote outposts, or Stations, are strategically located throughout the tax district. Successive levels of command are organized around response districts and rigid emergency response rules are maintained. Rotating shifts of various configurations provide a 24 hour emergency response “net.” A culture that fosters bravery, self-sacrifice, duty, honor and loyalty permeates the response arm of the fire service and a premium is placed on individual competence and technical wherewithal. (Brunacini, 1996) Referred to formally as “Line,” colloquially as “Combat,” this round-the-clock operational arm of the fire service maintains the bulk of the agency’s resources and personnel.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Just about any contemporary Fire Service Journal or text reveals this trend toward “renaming” fire departments to fit their expanding role. See, for example Grant and Hoover, *Fire Service Administration*, 1994.

<sup>2</sup> Benjamin Franklin first conceived of the 24 hour Fire Brigade, fire stations and rank structures.

<sup>3</sup> Generally speaking, when the average individual thinks of the local fire department, she thinks about the Line arm of the organization. By virtue of its emergency response mission -- which can be quite spectacular and heroic -- the Line function receives the greatest attention and far and away the greatest media

## *Staff*

In response to the fire service's ever-expanding mission and increasing administrative demands, a second functional categorization has evolved within a fire department's structure. Referred to simply as "Staff," this organizational arm provides administrative support for the agency. Characterized by standard work schedules, the staff arm of the fire service is responsible for the broader, "behind-the-scenes" administrative issues, such as strategic planning, budgeting, procurement and prevention. The staff arm maintains the majority of the centralized command structure of a fire department, therefore most proclamations concerning organizational goals, mission, programs and priorities are initiated from within this area. (NFPA, 1997)

## *Problem*

Within the fire service there has always been the need for administrative support, however, the degree of *staff* activity has traditionally been small and tasks were generally associated with support of *line* operations. Modern trends in fire service administration have changed this reality. As public officials continue to downsize government and taxpayers become less prone to accept government justifications for increased funding, fire officials have been forced to become creative in service delivery. (Grant and Hoover, 1994) In order to maintain organizational viability and vitality, progressive fire departments have begun to emphasize *prevention*, *hazard intervention* and *pre-hospital emergency care* as key roles of the fire service. Through the introduction of stringent fire codes, technically sophisticated fire protection systems and plans review, aggressive hazard intervention, community interaction, thorough public education of the fire problem, and an increased medical response mission, progressive departments have dramatically expanded the role of the fire service. These initiatives, viewed collectively, have essentially **changed** the central mission of the industry from one of *emergency response*, to one of *emergency prevention*. Staff functions, as a result of this role-expansion and changing fire

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coverage. Large-scale incidents -- such as the December 14, 1996 Centennial Condominium conflagration

service mission, have grown substantially and departments have seen a *tremendous* rise in non-emergency related job responsibilities and skills. (Hoover and Grant, 1994)

While necessary to remain viable, these trends may have inadvertently de-emphasized the need and importance of the combat arm of the fire service and placed a premium on staff-related functions.<sup>4</sup> Heretofore unheard of managerial initiatives such as *Total Quality Management, Data-driven Decision Making, Benchmarking* and *Value-Added Service Delivery* have become organizational buzz-words. Line personnel have found themselves inundated with *change* -- new initiatives, programs, projects, activities and philosophies that are both confusing and seemingly unrelated to *emergency mitigation*. Resistance and frustration are common. Staff personnel, responsible for introducing the progressive initiatives, find Line resistance to be confusing, narrow-minded and risk-averse. As further change is introduced, confusion abounds. As confusion abounds, resistance amplifies. Schism and conflict develop. . .

### *Presumption of Conflict*

As already stated, the purpose of this exploratory research is to examine the dynamics of the Line-Staff relationship within the Austin Fire Department, (AFD). It is expected that this relationship is characterized by conflict. The presumption of conflict in relation to this inter-group dynamic is non-quantitative -- it is based on years of observation and participation by the researcher. Obviously, this non-quantitative observation deserves some elaboration.

It has been this researcher's experience, during the 13 years of his career, that as officers and fire department personnel move from Line assignments to Staff assignments --

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in central Austin -- attract huge crowds of on-lookers, up to the thousands.

<sup>4</sup> Perhaps the best example of this can be noted by following trends in Fire Chief job requirements. As early as the mid-1970's, Fire Chiefs were generally assessed according to their technical firefighting vitas. Years of combat service, technical expertise and firefighting prowess were considered hallmarks of the successful candidate. In the late 1990's, little emphasis is placed on technical experience. A successful Fire Chief today is assessed according to his/her administrative capabilities, educational level and experience at

and then back again -- they have a tendency to adopt different attitudes, perceptions and feelings toward the organization, its groups, activities, decisions and initiatives. The old, but familiar saw, "Where you stand depends upon where you sit..." appears to be alive and well within the Austin Fire Department. This dichotomy in perception has always held a position of some intrigue for this researcher, especially as participants to the behavior appear to be unaware of their changing attitudes. Like the Grangerfords and Shepherdsons, AFD employees *appear* to function according to a set of social dynamics that unconsciously, but nevertheless doggedly, determine their behavior and attitudes toward the organization and each other. Most interestingly, this perceptual dichotomy appears to function according to an employees' assignment: *whether he or she is assigned to Staff or Line*. In this researcher's experience, and in his non-scientific observatory role, this perceptual dichotomy has a tendency to create an attitude of animosity and negative energy between the two functional groups of Line and Staff. Thus, the presumption of conflict which drives this inquiry is based on years of experience, observation and immersion within the organization of study.

### *Review*

The initial preamble in this chapter establishes the historical foundation for the existence of a Line-Staff categorization in fire departments and presents the evolutionary process which defines the structure of fire departments today. The notion of conflict in relation to the Line-Staff dynamic has been introduced and supported. In Chapter Three, the Literature which supports this investigation into group conflict is presented.

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managing programs. Premiums are placed on personal commitments to customer service, managing diversity and notions of economy and efficiency. See for example, Hoover and Grant, 1994.



## Chapter 3

### *Literature Review*

#### *Introduction to the Literature*

The purpose of this research is to explore the nature of the Line-Staff relationship within the Austin Fire Department. It is assumed that this relationship is characterized by conflict. Regrettably, but perhaps not surprisingly, there has been minimal academic or professional attention given to the phenomenon of line-staff conflicts in fire service organizations. As a result there is a dearth of literature related to this subject. Therefore, in order to adequately examine this relationship and to expand the available relevant literature, a broader conceptualization is necessary. This review of the literature proposes to examine the relevant literature related to line-staff relationships *in general*. In particular, the nature and evolution of *conflict*, as it relates to *group interaction* is investigated. Driving this line of inquiry is the assumption that line-staff conflicts can be explained through general language and concepts that are contextually removed from the organization where this conflict occurs. This assumption does not suggest that conflict exists free of its organizational context but, rather, that conflict can be explored utilizing general principles and empirical precepts that transcend organizational boundaries. By following this initial assumption, the researcher is free to explore the wealth of academic effort and is not handcuffed by contextually-imposed specificity.

This study is, at heart, an exploration into intra-organizational relations. There are several potential approaches to an investigation into intra-organizational relations. Numerous academic disciplines have both direct and tangential applications to organizational phenomenon and serve as ready candidates for theoretical understanding. Sociology, social psychology, organizational theory, cultural anthropology, transactional analysis. . .the potential theoretical underpinnings to organizational life are as varied as the

social-sciences spectrum itself. Hence, conducting research into organizational phenomena presents an initial -- and critical -- question: Which way do we go? Regrettably, there is no Yellow Brick Road which points the way to enlightenment. The researcher is free to choose.<sup>1</sup>

Recognizing this inherent ambiguity, initial assumptions, based on observation and experience, must be drawn regarding the nature of the Line-Staff relationship under investigation. The assumption that conflict is inherent to the Line-Staff relationship within the AFD is based on years of observation and participation. Obviously, this presumption of "conflict" determines in large measure the direction of the entire study. Indeed, the existence of conflict, it can be argued, is the central question being explored: Is conflict an inherent dimension to the Line-Staff relationship within the AFD? If so, how can it be described and whence does it come? These two questions serve as the driving force behind the search for theoretical explanations and tend to narrow the scope of the inquiry.

Using these two questions as guideposts, three areas of scholarly inquiry were distilled from the available literature as being intuitively related to intra-organizational conflict. These areas are 1) Organizational Culture, 2) Group Dynamics, and 3) Organizational Power Structures.<sup>2</sup> Organizational culture serves as the lens through which organizational behavior may be understood; group dynamics describe the social and psychological phenomena of group conflict; and power structures define the organizational frameworks which foster conflict between groups. Embedded within these three broad areas of scholarly inquiry rest a wealth of theoretical explanations for intra-organizational relations, (conflict).

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<sup>1</sup> Also...to err.

<sup>2</sup> Similar to the assumption of conflict, initial determinations were made regarding the relevance of scholarly categories. For example, intra-organizational conflict could be studied based on theoretical foundations drawn from the cultural anthropology and psychology literature's. But of what relevance would these findings be to the industry and of what value would they be to the Austin Fire Department? Furthermore, would alternative literature's add measurably to the external validity of the study? Thus, utility, relevancy and validity were important criteria to the selection of scholarly categories.

Thus, this chapter begins with an investigation into organizational culture. It is assumed that conflict should be a dimension of an organization's culture. If culture defines an organization's personality, as some expositors suggest, then it follows that a study into the phenomenon of line-staff conflicts should begin with an analysis of the culture literature. (Ott, 1989) Further, assuming that a line-staff conflict can be described in terms of group interaction, and the literature suggests that it can (Alderfer, 1977), the second area of inquiry investigated in this literature review is *group dynamics*. Finally, as the notion of group conflict is further concretized, it becomes apparent that many forms of conflict can be described in terms of power structures and power relationships between groups. (Astley & Sachdeva, 1984) Therefore, the final area of scholarly inquiry studied in this literature review is *power structures* between groups within organizations. As an addendum, a brief review of the fire service literature is discussed. The fire service literature, however, due to its lack of scholarly rigor, is not expected to materially add to the conceptual framework.

The above three concepts of organizational culture, group dynamics and power structures flow logically and sequentially. Each concept is imbedded within the other and acts synergistically with it to form a complete picture. The notion of conflict is central to all three areas of inquiry and serves as the thread upon which the literature review is spun. Combined, these areas of inquiry provide the theoretical foundation upon which an understanding of the Line-Staff relationship within the AFD can be made.

## **Organizational Culture**

### ***Culture Defined***

Truth is created rather than discovered, so there is no  
true definition or concept of culture. (Ott, 1989: 69)

The literature is mixed as to the exact definition of organizational culture. In fact, the realization that there are numerous and oftentimes conflicting approaches to understanding culture appears to be the central point of agreement among the culture

expositors (Smirich, 1983; Denison, 1996). It is possible that much of this ambivalence is due to the relative newness of the concept of culture to organizations (Smirich, 1983). Still a budding field of inquiry, *Organizational Culture* has been investigated from a multitude of different academic disciplines and been described through a variety of methodologies (Ott, 1989). While the all-encompassing nature of the concept of culture makes it a ripe field for inquiry, it also muddies any attempt to generate a coherent synthesis. As Steven Ott provocatively states:

...a comprehensive and integrative study of organizational culture requires analyzing and synthesizing theories and research findings from a wide array of academic disciplines. The task is formidable. Just for starters, the fields of organization theory, archaeology, anthropology, psychology, social psychology, sociology, organizational communication, and even biology contain knowledge, theories and research methods that are important for understanding organizational culture.....When one also considers contributions from subdisciplines such as material anthropology, cultural anthropology, learning theory, cognitive social psychology, social constructionism, clinical psychology, and transactional analysis, it becomes readily apparent why few attempts have been made to synthesize it, to 'pull it all together.'  
(Ott, 1989: 9)

Ott's statement reveals the complexity of the notion of culture in organizational studies. Culture is both dynamic and holistic and subsumes numerous fields of inquiry. As with any holistic construct, specific definitions fall short and tend to reflect the initial assumptions of the expositor (Smirich, 1983: 340).<sup>3</sup> Culture, as it relates to organizations,

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<sup>3</sup> If one were to ask you to describe the "good life" how would you approach the response? The response depends on initial assumptions as to what constitutes "good." A psychologist might consider "good" to be defined by a balanced constitution and an acceptance of one's place in the global scheme of things; an organizational theorist might consider "good" to be dictated by notions of economy and efficiency, and so on. Similarly, the definition of "Culture," as an organizational phenomenon, tends to mirror the approach taken to describe it and the assumptions of the researcher. Some expositors, such as Herbert Kaufman (*Time, Chance and Organizations*, 1991) approach organizational theory from an ivory tower, with profound philosophical theories to describe organizational behavior. Others, such as Peters and Waterman (*In Search of Excellence*, 1980) view culture mechanically -- as a manager's tool to improve productivity. The lion's share of the culture literature falls somewhere between these two extremes.

has therefore become dissected into a variety of “schools” which attempt to explain the phenomenon.<sup>4</sup>

In an attempt to find common ground within the organizational culture literature, Linda Smircich (1983: 341) identifies two broad approaches to the study of culture: 1) organic, and 2) expressive. According to the organic approach, organizational culture is a determined phenomenon, that is, it is “imported into the organization through the membership. Its presence is believed to be revealed in the patterns of attitudes and actions of individual organizational members.” (Smirich, 1983: 343) The organic approach employs systems theory and assumes that the organization itself is a culture-producing entity. The resultant culture is viewed as a product of the structural variables, such as organization size, technology, leadership patterns, etc. Culture, according to this approach, maintains a symbiotic relationship with the organization by contributing to its overall stability. Organizational culture, in this perspective, embodies “the values or social ideals and the beliefs that organization members come to share.” (Smirich, 1983: 344). This approach views culture as a product of either it’s overall environment or the collective result of human interaction within the organization. Culture is viewed to be cause-effect and is known through “...patterns of relationships across and within boundaries.” (Smirich, 1983: 347)

In the “expressive” approach, culture is viewed not as a product of the organization, but rather as the organization *itself*. Sub-divided into “cognitive,” “symbolic” and “psychodynamic,” the expressive approach promotes culture as a “root metaphor” which views organizations as “expressive forms, manifestations of human consciousness.” (Smirich, 1983: 347) In this approach, culture is similar to a paradigm or world view in

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<sup>4</sup> While a comprehensive evaluation of the numerous “schools” is beyond the scope of this current research, some of the more prominent schools will be investigated and a general synthesis of the culture literature developed. Common themes will be extracted from the literature and a general definition will be determined. Finally, a link between organizational culture and group conflict will be examined. For an expanded elaboration of the numerous approaches to organizational culture, see Stevenson, W.B., *Power, Interaction, Position and the Generation of Cultural Agreement in Organizations* and Smircich, L., *Concepts of Culture and Organizational Analysis*.

that it represents an understanding of reality and it influences behavior. Expositors who promote this approach view organizations as “networks of subjective meanings or shared frames of reference that organization members share to varying degrees and which, to an external observer, appear to function in a rule-like, or grammar-like manner.” (Smirich, 1983: 349) To the extent that this paradigm -- or culture -- is consistent and held by all organizational members, is it considered to be strong.

In his seminal work on culture, *The Organizational Culture Perspective*, Steven Ott (1989) characterizes organizational culture as the basic underlying assumptions that organize beliefs and values and influence organizational behavior. Ott even goes a step further by arguing that basic assumptions evolve to the point where they become subconscious motivators of employee behavior, “They become the underlying, unquestioned -- but virtually forgotten -- reasons for ‘the way we do things here,’ even when the ways are no longer appropriate. They are so basic, so pervasive, and so totally accepted as the truth that no one thinks about or remembers them.” (Ott, 1989: 3) Ott’s understanding of organizational culture tends to violate Smirich categorizations by combining both the organic and expressive perspectives of culture. Ott suggests that an organization’s culture is determined by several variables, such as structure, technology and the broader environment where it is found, but adds that a culture can not be measured strictly by these variables. Culture, according to Ott, is an entity itself. Thus, Ott’s perspective tends to merge both the organic and the expressive views.

Stevenson and Bartunek (1996: 77) advance a different synergy of the culture literature, in which the literature on culture can be grouped into three different perspectives: 1) integration, 2) differentiation, and 3) fragmentation. Central to all three perspectives is the agreement that organizational culture is “the meanings and understandings that members share about their work and the expression of these meanings in particular behaviors.” (Stevenson & Bartunek, 1996: 75) What is different between the three perspectives is the

variability between notions of cultural agreement -- that is, perceptions of meaning. As the authors note:

Each perspective implies a very different type of cultural agreement in an organization. According to an integration perspective, there is cultural unity within the organization, an overall shared viewpoint....According to a differentiation perspective, there is a series of overlapping, nested, organizational subcultures. There is inconsistency across the organization, and consensus only within subgroups. Finally, a fragmentation perspective abandons claims of cultural clarity, of universal subgroup agreement. Rather, it focuses on a multiplicity of understandings and meanings that rarely, if ever, coalesce into a stable consensus either within or between groups. (Stevenson & Bartunek, 1996: 77)

According to these three perspectives, culture is an active, determined phenomenon that hinges on the collective views of organizational members.<sup>5</sup> Central to Stevenson & Bartunek's (1996) perspective is the notion of groups and subgroups. Culture, in this perspective, is perceived as existing in various forms of *agreement* between members of the organization as they interact either collectively or in groups. The strength of the cultural unity depends on the degree of the cultural agreement between actors in the organization.

While the approaches to studying culture can be wildly divergent, the conclusions drawn from these studies appear to have some common themes. In fact, there is much acceptance within the culture literature that *beliefs, values, and assumptions* -- represented by *patterns of behavior* -- define an organization's culture. (Ott, 1989; Denison, 1996) In a comprehensive comparison between research on organizational culture and "climate," Daniel Denison (1996: 622) agrees that studies of culture focus on, "...the importance of a deep understanding of underlying assumptions, individual meaning, and the insider's point of view of the organization."

Recognizing this commonality, it is arguable that many of the differences between approaches to culture are perceptual rather than substantive -- the multiple approaches

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<sup>5</sup> While both Smircich (1983) and Stevenson/Bartunek (1996) purport to synthesize the culture literature, it is interesting to note that their approaches to the syntheses are different. Smircich synthesizes the literature in an attempt to explain the root causes of culture -- where does it come from and how is it defined. Stevenson and Bartunek attempt to describe culture -- what it looks like and how is it manifested. Both approaches are important to a complete understanding of culture.

appear to converge on consistent ground.<sup>6</sup> It should be safe, therefore, to distill the organizational culture literature into the following: 1) shared values and beliefs, 2) basic assumptions (or perceptions), and 3) patterns of behavior which reflect values, beliefs and assumptions. Collectively, these three elements provide a working definition of culture and a framework through which organizational behavior may be understood.

### *Culture & Conflict*

If an organization is in conflict, or if groups within an organization are within conflict, what does this conflict imply about that organization's culture? Smircich (1983:346) advances an intriguing commentary:

Much of the literature refers to an organizational culture, appearing to lose sight of the great likelihood that there are multiple organizational subcultures, or even counter cultures, competing to define the nature of situations within organizational boundaries.

There is a great deal of evidence that sub-cultures exist in organizations. (Ott, 1989; Wilkins & Ouchi, 1983) Ott categorizes sub-cultures into three distinct groups according to their orientation to the supraculture -- enhancing, orthogonal, and counter-culture. In enhancing and orthogonal cultures, the predominant supraculture is still operative. In a counter-culture, there are assumptions, values and goals that are incongruent with those espoused by the supraculture, thus leading to conflict. (Ott, 1989)

While group dynamics and group conflict are explored in-depth in the following section, it is important to the discussion of culture to identify how subcultures, and the groups that align around them, are formed. Wilkins and Ouchi note that the process of organizational specialization sets the stage where sub and countercultures can be formed:

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<sup>6</sup> A useful association exists between culture and personality. Personalities ultimately determine behavior and are rooted in deeply held belief systems and basic assumptions. While personalities may vary, it is arguable that they derive from similar concepts -- such as notions of meaning and value. Organizational culture can be viewed as the organization's personality. Or as Killman states: "Culture is to the organization what personality is to the individual -- a hidden, yet unifying theme that provides meaning, direction, and mobilization. " (Killman, 1985)



The typical specialization of organizations suggests that specialists with common professional training will often be placed together to perform particular functions. The resulting frequent contact on similar problems utilizing shared professional orientations is likely to reinforce a shared professional clan rather than an overall organizational clan.... It is possible that a stable group of people shares a relatively long history, is isolated from or discredits institutional alternatives, and yet develops several alternative cultures, because members only associate in smaller groups within the whole. (1983: 474)

Organizations differentiate and categorize according to function and specialization. The literature on organization theory is unequivocal -- differentiation and specialization are natural and necessary functions of organizational life. (Kramer, 1991: 200) Depending on the complexity of the organization, levels of differentiation can be as simple as two functional categorizations -- such as line and staff -- or multiple divisions, sections, specialized roles, etc. The degree of specialization and differentiation denotes the degree of complexity of the organization.

While differentiation and categorization into organizational groups and sub-groups does not necessarily suggest conflict, it does provide the conditions where conflict can emerge. As Kramer (1991: 192) notes:

Groups in transaction with one another over time rarely remain neutral toward one another. Between them and their individual members, there develop reciprocal states of friendship and hatred, trust or mistrust, aggressive intent or willingness to give a helping hand. This is the undeniable fact of social life.<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, Nelson (1989: 376) refers to conflict between groups as a “ubiquitous feature of social systems.” Thus, there appears to be a natural propensity for groups to clash.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> There is a tremendous amount of evidence in the literature to support this phenomenon; see Nelson, 1989, *The Strength of Strong Ties: Social Networks and Intergroup Conflict in Organizations*; also, Rentsch, J., 1990, *Climate and Culture: Interaction and Qualitative Differences in Organizational Meanings*; also, Alderfer, 1977, *Group and Intergroup Relations*.

<sup>8</sup> However, conflict does not imply counter-culture. In fact, many of the scholars on group dynamics suggest that a certain amount of conflict is healthy: “...most theorists have agreed that a certain degree of conflict is an endemic and perhaps positive factor in organizations yet at the same time have recognized that beyond a certain point, conflict is destructive.” (Nelson, 1989: p. 378) The quality of conflict is a matter of degree.

David Brown (1978: 163) notes that groups are mobilized by conflict, and that this mobilization leads to the development of “internal cohesion, conformity, and militance; and the *development of world views and ideologies*.” (emphasis added) While a discussion of the amplification of group bias and its effects on member perceptions is advanced in the next section, what is important to note here is that the literature suggests that group conflict can lead to conditions that foster the creation of countercultures. Coupling Brown’s logic to a synthesis of the culture literature, it follows that if the world views between groups are opposed, the values, beliefs and assumptions between the groups are opposed. If the values, beliefs and assumptions are in opposition, a counter-culture may exist.

It is apparent from the literature that the process of specialization and categorization, coupled with the dynamics of group interaction establish the requisite energy to form counter cultures that are in conflict with the supraculture. An investigation into the process of group interaction provides greater clarity into this phenomenon and is discussed in the next section of this literature review.

## **Group Dynamics**

### *Group Defined*

The human group is the most familiar  
thing in the world. (Alderfer, 1977: 229)

Groups exist everywhere and we are all members in and products of group activity. Whether groups are formed around social interests, religious preferences or professional specializations, they define in many ways our collective perceptions of the world around us. Groups add dimension to life by providing self-identity and affiliation. As Clayton Alderfer (1977: 230) notes, “Because groups abound everywhere and most people are members of several groups, each of us does possess the accumulated knowledge of his personal experiences with group life.” Groups, in many ways, define us.

Despite the ubiquitous nature of groups, a concrete definition of “group” is nevertheless elusive. Similar to the notion of culture, “group” is a social phenomenon and therefore doesn’t yield to simple definitions. Groups, cross-cutting groups, issue groups, sub-groups, sub-groups of sub-groups -- the potential “groupings” presented by social interaction are limitless. This universality tends to blur the distinctions and makes concretization difficult.<sup>9</sup>

Some scholars define groups fairly loosely, such as Alvin Zandler (1977: 6) who refers to groups as “...a collection of individuals who are interdependent to some degree.” Other authors simply define groups as “easily identifiable factions.” (Nelson, 1989). Many scholars do not attempt a definition at all.<sup>10</sup> Clayton Alderfer (1982), a highly published scholar on group theory, has recognized this problem and in response advanced the following 5-point definition of “Groups:”

A human group is a collection of individuals (1) who have significantly interdependent relations with each other, (2) who perceive themselves as a group by reliably distinguishing members from non-members, (3) whose group identity is recognized by non-members, (4) who, as group members acting alone or in concert, have significantly interdependent relations with other groups, and (5) whose roles in the group are therefore a function of expectations from themselves, from other group members, and from non-group members. (1982: 38)

Central to Alderfer’s conceptualization of groups is the notion of “interdependence.”

Interdependence is advanced as a necessary function for group identity and represents the degree of interaction between group members. The group literature is overwhelmingly supportive of this notion.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> In describing the difficulty with concrete definitions of social concepts, Steven Ott offers an interesting analogy: “It is easy to get people to agree that frogs are green once there is consensus about what constitutes green. Without agreement on green, there is no way to secure consensus on the color of a frog.” (1989: 51) This analogy recognizes that definitions of concepts, such as “group,” are made difficult by the many different approaches taken to define them.

<sup>10</sup> It was interesting to note that the literature on Group Theory and Group Dynamics was replete with scholarly works that did not begin with a statement of group definition. Intuitively, the concept of “group” may seem simple. However, by this omission, the literature promotes ambiguity.

<sup>11</sup> See Smith, *The Movement of Conflict in Organizations: The Joint Dynamic of Splitting and Triangulation*, 1989 ; also, Nelson, *The Strength of Strong Ties: Social Networks and Intergroup Contact*

Furthermore, both implicit and explicit definitions of groups in the literature support the notion that group identity is recognized by group members: in-group members delineate between group and non-group members. (Alderfer, 1982; Kramer, 1991) Perhaps William Doise (1978: 110) describes this phenomenon the best, "Belonging to a group contributes to the development of a positive social identity if this group can be favorably compared with other groups. Individuals actively attempt to establish a positively evaluated difference between their own group and other groups." Moreover, Alderfer (1982: 39) notes that the strength of a group's identity determines its degree of permeability to out-group influence. Recognized in the literature as group "boundaries," as in-group identity increases, the permeability of the group to outside (or out-group) influence decreases.<sup>12</sup>

While the literature may suffer ambivalence on exact constructions of "groups," it seems to support the following: 1) a group experiences interdependence between its members, 2) a group identifies and separates itself from other groups, 3) a group is easily identifiable, and 4) a group has boundaries that vary in permeability.

### *Group Formation*

Complex organizations are highly differentiated social systems. Structural and functional differentiation are necessary in organizations because many specialized groups are needed to get the work of the organization done. (Kramer, 1991: 200)

In an organizational context, Alderfer suggests two ways to categorize groups, 1) identity and 2) organizational. Identity groups are based on world-views that are brought into the organization and are rooted in similar experiences between members. Identity groups are more social and ideological in their orientation. Organizational groups, in contrast, are created by work specialization and structural categorization. "An organization

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*in Organizations*, 1989; also Kramer, *Intergroup Relations and Organizational Dilemmas: The Role of Categorization Processes*, 1991.

group may be conceived of as a group whose members share approximately common organizational positions, participate in equivalent work experiences, and consequently have similar organizational views.” (Alderfer, 1982: 38)<sup>13</sup>

In both simple and complex organizations, groups are formed around structural and functional responsibilities. (Wilkins and Ouchi, 1983) These groups may be formed formally, such as a task-force with specific responsibilities, or informally, as in general role-affiliation. The process of dividing organizations into functional groups is referred to in the literature as “categorization.” (Kramer, 1991) The process of categorization is considered by many writers on group literature to be responsible for establishing the social boundaries that determine group interaction. As Baron and Pfeffer (1989) note:

“Organizations are certainly very much in the business of creating categories....[thus] it is quite likely that these categories, organizationally defined and institutionalized, order the social world, determine the contours of social comparison and interaction, and shape the pattern of reward allocations observed.” (p. 14, as quoted in Kramer, 1991: 201) Thus, organizational categorization can be viewed as the formal and informal differentiation of organizational members into discrete groups.

Organizational and structural categories (groups) can be as varied as the organizations that create them. Defining the specific membership of the multiple groups formed through the categorization process, however, may be somewhat more difficult as members may belong to several different groupings. (Kramer, 1991; Alderfer, 1977) Stevenson and Bartunek (1996: 83) advance the concept of “structurally equivalent actors” to develop a better understanding of group membership. Organizational “actors” may be broadly grouped according to “structural equivalence,” that is, their organizational placement. Even though structurally equivalent actors may belong to a variety of sub-groups, they share common perceptions and “frames of reference” which are based upon

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<sup>12</sup> This phenomenon will be discussed further under the heading, *Group Mobilization and Conflict: Contact and Interaction*.

<sup>13</sup> Only the “organizational group” will be examined in this literature review.

their structural equivalence. Thus, Stevenson and Bartunek advance a broader conceptualization of group membership which allows a broader operationalization of “groups” within the field of group dynamics.

### *Group Mobilization and Conflict: Contact and Interaction*

As was noted in the above section, the literature suggests that the categorization process can have either positive or negative effects on group behavior. Indeed, while the process of categorization is a necessary function of organizational specialization, the literature agrees that it may create far-reaching and unpredictable consequences for group interaction. This phenomenon is best described by Kramer (1991: 201):

As a result of assignment to organizational categories, individuals in the organization find themselves sorted and classified into distinctive categories or groups which act to differentiate them (and other within category members) from other individuals in the organization. This process of categorization can have pervasive effects on the nature and relationships that develop between individuals who occupy those different categories or groups. One of the significant consequences of the functional categorization of organizational members, then, is that it activates *social* categorization processes whose consequences may be quite dysfunctional.

Kramer (1991) argues that this “social categorization” process has psychological implications that cause the employee to view interactions in terms of group identity rather than organizational or individual identities. Further, Kramer argues that this process engenders an in-group/out-group orientation among group members. Clayton Alderfer (1997: 242) refers to this tendency as “ethnocentrism,” or the tendency for group members to,

...associate positive affect with the in-group and negative affect with the out-group. This process relieves members from some of the pain of internal dissent and self-criticism by psychologically locating bad traits more outside than inside their own boundaries.

Dennis Mumby (1988: 58) refers to this process as the “mobilization of bias,” or the “dominant values and political myths, rituals and institutions which tend to favor the vested interests of one or more groups, relative to others.”

As a further extension of this phenomenon, it has been shown that group interaction also influences interpretations of organizational events. In a compelling study of group interaction, Joan Rentsch (1990) notes that group interaction produces similar interpretations of organizational events among *within-group members*. Further, Rentsch suggests that different interaction groups assign *different meanings* to the *same* organizational events. William Doise (1978: 2), in an attempt to interpret this phenomenon through a different study, suggests that “...the mere fact of sharing a common fate, regardless of its origin, thus seems to be sufficient to induce evaluative discrimination in favor of one’s membership group.”

While within group interaction leads to the mobilization of bias between groups, Nelson (1989) notes that it is the degree, or the strength of in-group “ties,” that tends to reduce the permeability of group boundaries and increase the degree of conflict between groups. In a compelling study, Nelson (1989: 378) posits that organizations experiencing conflict maintain highly internally cohesive groups:

A prominent feature of competing groups is the tendency for their members to become more cohesive internally while developing negative stereotypes and other perceptual distortions of those outside their group. Increased cohesion leads to pressure to conform to group norms, reducing in turn the group’s ability to process novel and dissonant information. Polarization and disruptive conflict are often the result.<sup>14</sup>

According to Nelson, within-group ties can be measured according to three factors: 1) frequency, 2) reciprocity, and 3) friendship; Nelson notes that strong group ties are

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<sup>14</sup> There is a great deal of support for this in the literature. Irving Janus (1982: 5), in a compelling text titled *Groupthink*, notes that as group cohesiveness increases, there is an increased tendency for conflict between groups and for group members to stereotype out-group members.

characterized by frequent contacts that possess friendly and reciprocal overtones. (1989: 380)

In his study of group dynamics, Nelson (1989) also notes that organizations experiencing conflict suffer poor between-group contact. Referred to as the “contact hypothesis” there is overwhelming support for the notion that contact between groups reduces the incidence of conflict.<sup>15</sup> Nelson advances three causal explanations to describe the effect of contact on group conflict. The first, referred to as “Homans Classic,” states simply that activity between groups leads to interaction, which in turn leads to positive affect. The second causal explanation is that contact maintains the permeability of group boundaries and thus reduces intergroup polarization. Finally, it is believed that interaction between groups allows groups to communicate and resolve differences before they become intractable conflicts. (Nelson, 1989: 378)<sup>16</sup>

#### *Group Mobilization and Conflict: Goal Inconsistencies*

When it is impossible for a group to attain its goal,  
we find schism and division. (Doise, 1978: 105)

Dean Tjosvold (1988), a leading writer on group dynamics, argues that conflict within organizations can be understood in terms of competition between work groups. Specifically, Tjosvold argues that if perceptions of organizational goals are competitive, then there is an environment of conflict.

People with competitive goals develop much different dynamics. They believe their goals are negatively related; as they move toward goal attainment, others find it more difficult to achieve their goals. They are in a win-lose situation in which their successes are incompatible. They fail to assist each other and either avoid or escalate their conflicts. (1988: 426)

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<sup>15</sup> Virtually every scholarly article on group conflict examined by this writer discussed the notion of *contact* and *interaction* as central to group action. For more information on this phenomenon, see Rentsch, 1990, *Climate and Culture: Interaction and Qualitative Differences in Organizational Meanings*, and Kramer, 1991, *Intergroup Relations and Organizational Dilemmas*.

<sup>16</sup> See also, Brown, 1978, *Toward a Theory of Power and Intergroup Relations*.



When in conflict, Tjosvold (1988: 427) maintains that organizational groups will 1) not share information or resources, 2) fail to assist each other, 3) believe the other group to be incompetent and ineffective, and 4) display a lack of confidence that they can work cooperatively in the future. Conversely, Tjosvold also suggests that when goals are “cooperative,” there is, “...confident expectations, exchange of information and resources, positive affect, efficient and quality task performance, and confidence in others and in future collaboration.”

In his study on intergroup contact, Reed Nelson (1989: 379) acknowledges that incongruent goals between groups moderates the positive effect of cross-cutting ties between groups, thus suggesting that the perception of inconsistent goals perpetuates conflict between groups. Moreover, in their discussion of organizational “clans,” or groups, Wilkins and Ouchi (1983: 476) note that, “...Clans cannot long exist under conditions of goal incongruence.”<sup>17</sup>

It is important to note that *perceptions* of goal inconsistency are important. Whether there is an actual inconsistency or not, the perception of the group membership determines their reaction to it. As Kramer (1991: 195) notes:

...it is the individual's perception of social reality and the processing of this information that influences individual behavior and the individual's interpretations of social reality that are crucial rather than the 'real' nature of the situation.

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<sup>17</sup> John Rehfuss, in his text, The Job of the Public Manager, draws a direct correlation between an organization's goals, values and culture. According to Rehfuss, goals are the expression of values and values define the culture. (Rehfuss, 1989: 60) It follows that if goals are incongruent, likewise are the values. As was noted in the first section, inconsistent values suggest counter-culture.

## *Group Mobilization and Conflict: Competition Over Resources*

Organization, or cooperative action, necessarily involves interdependent exchange between individuals in which each party gives something of value and receives something of value in return. (Wilkins and Ouchi, 1983: 470)

Much of the literature on group behavior targets competition for limited resources as an inducement to group conflict.<sup>18</sup> However, many expositors have developed a broader conceptualization of “organizational resources.” In the literature, “resources” are considered to be both tangible and intangible. Kramer (1991: 197) categorizes tangible resources as “physical space, staff, *information*, and fiscal resources.” (emphasis added) Intangible resources, such as *status* and *recognition* are described as being more symbolic, but no less important. Further, to the degree that these resources are considered limited, competition for them, according to Kramer, may become very intense. As competition increases, conflict between the competing groups increases.

David Brown (1978: 163) agrees. In his study on power relationships between groups, Brown defines power as “access to and control over resources.” Interestingly, in his listing of “resources,” Brown conspicuously omits financial matters and focuses on “*information*, rewards and legitimate authority” as resources that give power to one group over another.

Kramer (1991) suggests that groups in competition for resources tend to overestimate their “entitlement” to available resources. Likewise, they tend to underestimate the entitlement of other groups. According to Kramer, this perception amplifies and creates a condition where a group always considers itself as “underbenefitted.” As Kramer (1991: 209) notes, “As a result of such perceptions, groups may find themselves engaged in a competition for resources that is driven by strongly held but mutually inconsistent convictions regarding their entitlement to organizational resources.”

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<sup>18</sup> See for example, Kramer, 1991; Wilkins and Ouchi, 1983; or Brown, 1978

The literature is clear that perceptions of resource scarcity, or an imbalance in resource allocation, lead to conflict between groups. It is also clear that conceptualizations of “resources” go deeper than simple notions of finance. There is a great emphasis in the literature on “information” and “access to information” as forms of organizational resource that may lead to conflict. (Kramer, 1991; Mumby, 1978)

### *The Movement of Group Conflict in Organizations*

The study of intergroup relations is also closely related to the analysis of conflict....conflictual intergroup relations, regardless of how they became that way, are characterized by a systematic pattern of emotional relations among the related groups. (Alderfer, 1977: 241)

Once the perception of conflict becomes operative in groups, there exists the tendency for groups to perpetuate the conflict in predictable patterns, in spite of its potential for negative effects. (Brown, 1978) This phenomenon begins with the perception of conflict and is linked to notions of “common enemy” or “common threat.”<sup>19</sup> As group members perceive an external enemy to the group or its mission, there is the tendency for the group to become increasingly internally cohesive. As the group builds cohesion, negative stereotyping of the perceived “threat” increases. “Those stereotypes contribute over time to losing sight of similarities and interdependencies between the groups, and to an emphasis on their differences and conflicts of interests.” (Brown, 1978: 163) In turn, group boundaries become less permeable and communication between groups and across-group contact are reduced. Distrust and distortion amplify. (Brown, 1978; Alderfer, 1977)

These behaviors have a tendency to self-reinforce. As Brown (1978: 163) notes, “Aggressive behavior by one group confirms the distrust and stereotypes of the other, and legitimates their conteraggression, which in turn justifies counter-counteraggression in a viscous cycle.” Behavior and perceptions of groups in conflict become increasingly

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<sup>19</sup> See for example, Rentsch, 1990; Janus, 1982; Alderfer, 1977.

irrational and distorted as the boundaries between them become less permeable. (Alderfer, 1977; Janus, 1982)

According to Kenwyn Smith (1989: 4), as intergroup conflict amplifies, it begins to move in predictable patterns throughout the organization. Based on a thorough study into the movement of conflict, Smith argues that conflict amplifies in triangles. As group A is in conflict with group B, group C is drawn in by group A and a coalition is established. Likewise, group B will in turn triangulate for support with group D. Kenwyn refers to this process as “secondary triangulation.”<sup>20</sup> According to Smith, secondary triangulation will continue to amplify until a “balance” or stalemate between two ultimate parties results.<sup>21</sup> As Kenwyn notes, “...the most common consequence of repeated secondary triangulation is that what started as a conflict between X and Y becomes quickly transformed into a conflict between two opposing coalitions...” (Smith, 1989: 6)

Furthermore, notions of conflict can become entrenched through the socialization of new group members and may thus be passed from generation to generation. (Wilkins and Ouchi, 1983) Wilkins and Ouchi (1983: p 473) note that the socialization process causes the “ad hoc conceptions and social routines of the first generation [to] now become historic institutions, apparently social facts inherent in the situation.” According to Wilkins and Ouchi, this social knowledge is passed from generation to generation and in the process, becomes hardened into a form of culture.

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<sup>20</sup> “Primary triangulation” is discussed by Smith but involves the movement of conflict between individuals and is therefore not relevant to the current research.

<sup>21</sup> Smith employs the “rules of interaction” put forth by the “balance theorists” to support this conclusion. According to the balance theorists, “...all pairs in a triad moves [sic] toward a state of *internal congruence*.” (Smith, 1989: 5, emphasis added) Following this rule, Smith argues that in secondary triangulation, two and only two parties will be the end-result. One of the assumptions that motivated this study was that there is a We-Them schism aligned along the line-staff boundaries within the Austin Fire Department. Secondary triangulation could explain this phenomenon.

## Power Structures and Power Asymmetries

### *Power Defined: Narrowing the Focus*

Every social act is an exercise of power, every social relationship is a power equation, and every social group or system is an exercise of power. Accordingly, it is possible to transpose any system of social relationships into terms of potential or active power.  
(Hawley, 1963: 422, in Astley, 1984)

Similar to both “culture” and “group,” the notion of “power” is social, therefore, it is an elusive and fluid concept. Power is both multifaceted and dynamic, and numerous analytical approaches to power have been advanced over the years. (Cobb, 1984) As the above quotation by Hawley suggests, almost *every* social transaction can be viewed as a power exchange. Thus, attempts at specificity tend to over-simplify the concept and are generally met with scholastic resistance. (Cobb, 1984)<sup>22</sup> As one leading writer on power has noted, “In the entire lexicon of sociological concepts none is more troublesome than the concept of power. We all know perfectly well what it is -- until someone asks us.” (Bierstadt, 1950: 730) Apparently, recognizing the existence of power and its pervasive nature is much easier than defining it.

While there are numerous definitions of power in the literature, for the purposes of this research, a specific definition of power is not necessary. It is the *characteristics* of power and their contribution to conflict within organizations that are of interest to this study. Of particular interest are structural and functional arrangements within organizations that contribute to power balances (or imbalances) between groups.<sup>23</sup> As Dennis Mumby (1988: 56) has noted, “...power is not something that a person possesses, but is rather a

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<sup>22</sup> An example of this specificity can be found in Brown’s article, *Towards a Theory of Power and Intergroup Relations*, 1978. In his article, Brown defines power strictly as “control over resources.” (p. 163)

<sup>23</sup> Thus, the analysis of power taken in this review is specific to the motivations of the study and does not attempt to comprehensively evaluate the power literature. A thorough investigation into the myriad and divergent approaches to understanding power in organizations is arguably too ambitious an undertaking for this study.

relation among people.” It is the structural power relationships between groups that are of interest to this study.

### *Power Structures*

Organizations, by their very nature, create institutional inducements to conflict. It has already been shown that the process of categorization and specialization contributes to the development of groups. And while conflict may occur as a product of inherent group dynamics, there is also support that institutional inducements to conflict may occur. Goal inconsistency and resource competition have been advanced as organizational inducements to conflict. The literature also suggests that the power structure of organizations serves as a potential cause of intergroup conflict. (Alderfer, 1977) Two dimensions of organizational power structures are investigated in this review: Hierarchy and Workflow Linkages.

### *Hierarchy*

While there are numerous forms of organizational structure, even the simplest organization chart has an element of hierarchy within it. (Donnelly, et. al., 1987) Hierarchy exists within organizations as an instrument of order and control, and serves as both practical and symbolic representation of the organization’s distribution of authority. Whether an organization’s hierarchy is “flat” or “tall,” the literature agrees that formal authority rests with the positions at the top of the hierarchy.<sup>24</sup> By decree, power rests with these positions, and is exercised as formal prerogative. (Astley & Sachdeva, 1984) Thus, hierarchy is a structural form of power distribution which serves to consolidate power at the top. As a result, decisions and “important issues” are tied to the hierarchy -- the more important a decision, the higher it is referred within the framework. (Mumby, 1988)

Dennis Mumby (1988: 67) argues that hierarchy serves as the instrument through which competing groups acquire dominance. According to Mumby, organizations are

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<sup>24</sup> See for example, Astley & Sachdeva, 1984; Mumby, 1988; or Cobb 1984.

comprised of groups with diverse needs and competing interests, and suggests that "...the groups with the most power will be those that are best able to integrate their sectional interests into the very structuring of the organization." Mumby further argues that the structuration process, or organization chart, serves as the framework by which groups achieve control and power over the organization: "...groups struggle to constitute structures in order that they may become constituting." (Ransom, et al., 1980: 8; in Mumby, 1988: 67) According to Mumby, to the extent that a group is tied to the power of hierarchy is it able to meet its goals and special interests.

It follows that if one group is better represented within the hierarchy, or has stronger ties to the upper positions of the hierarchy, it retains power. Mumby suggests that meetings serve as the best barometer to determine whether a group is tied to the power of hierarchy. As Mumby (1988:68) notes:

Meetings are perceived as a necessary and pervasive characteristic of organizational life -- they are events that people are required to engage in if decisions are to be made and goals are to be accomplished. While this is the ostensible rationale for meetings, they also function as one of the most visible and important sites of organizational power. They are examples par excellence of the symbolic structuring of power...

According to Mumby, meetings provide the forum for groups to promote their interests and agendas and to participate in the direction of the organization.

### *Workflow Linkages*

As was discussed in the section on group dynamics, organizations are involved in the process of categorization and specialization. This process differentiates the organization into specific functional groupings, such as line or staff, etc. According to Astley and Sachdeva (1984: 106), positions within each grouping may reintegrate into the organization through interconnected networks of interaction. To the extent that a group becomes interconnected in this network, or "workflow linkages," does it acquire power. As the authors note: "To the extent that actors are located at tightly coupled interconnected nodes in

the network, they gain power because their immersion in multiple interdependencies makes them functionally indispensable.”<sup>25</sup>

This phenomenon is referred to in the literature as “Network Centrality,” and can be developed either formally through “prescribed networks,” or informally, through “emergent networks.” Prescribed networks follow the organizational chart and are structurally “prescribed,” such as the link between an organization’s director and her assistant directors. Emergent networks are a product of interactions related to “work matters,” such as the link between recruitment and personnel divisions within an organization. (Astley & Sachdeva, 1984: 106) Collectively, the two networks determine the degree of interconnectivity of positions and groups.

Network Centrality is measured in terms of its “pervasiveness.” (Astley & Sachdeva, 1984; Cook, 1977) “Pervasiveness” refers to the degree to which a position or sub-unit is interconnected to other positions or sub-units within the overall network. The authors note that a position within the hierarchy, even though it may be near the top, but low in pervasiveness, suffers a drop in power.<sup>26</sup> Likewise, a position in the middle of the hierarchy, but with a highly pervasive centrality, experiences an increase in power. Furthermore, the authors suggest that work units that measure high in pervasiveness, amass much more power than units that measure low. (1984: 107-109) Finally, the authors note that highly pervasive positions and work groups are responsible for making important organizational decisions. (1984: 110)

While they employ different vernacular, many scholars agree with the notion of “connection power.”<sup>27</sup> Anthony Cobb (1984: 488) suggests that this form of power is a result of the “informal” organization -- the network of influence that “...is built primarily

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<sup>25</sup> This particular article discusses the notion of workflow links in terms of individual positions and work units rather than “groups,” (although a work unit certainly qualifies as a “group”). While it requires a minor -- but safe -- deduction, it follows that the group with the most integrated and interconnected positions is the group that will possess the most network-related power.

<sup>26</sup> The authors do note that positions near the top of the hierarchy generally experience high levels of centrality, or greater pervasiveness.

<sup>27</sup> See for example, Cobb, 1984; Stevenson and Bartunek 1996; or Brown, 1978.



on those cliques, interest groups, and coalitions that occur either naturally or by conscious design within the organization.”

### *Power Asymmetry and Group Conflict*

The literature is clear that power imbalances between groups lead to conflict.<sup>28</sup> As David Brown (1978: 161) describes, “Many of the most violent and intractable conflicts in the world today are characterized by the combination of group differences and power differences.” Clayton Alderfer (1977: 241) goes so far as to say that studies into intergroup relations *are* studies of power relations, and notes that groups of unequal power suffer high levels of conflict. There is also evidence that power asymmetries between groups cause group boundaries to become less permeable, thus resulting in many of the dysfunctional phenomena described in the previous section of this review. (Alderfer & Smith, 1982: 39)

### **Fire Service Literature**

The great majority of the literature for the Fire Service is based on expert opinion rather than empirical research.<sup>29</sup> Most of the articles submitted for publication are written by fire service professionals and are anecdotal descriptions of local initiatives. Those areas of inquiry within the fire service literature that do employ scientific methods are usually related to the physical sciences, such as fire propagation, rate of heat release, combustibility of materials, etc. Minimal empirical attention is given to administrative issues within the fire service literature.<sup>30</sup> There is an increasing trend within the literature to *discuss*

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<sup>28</sup> See, Alderfer, 1977; Alderfer & Smith, 1982; Krammer, 1991; or Stevenson & Bartunek, 1996.

<sup>29</sup> Even a cursory look at the most popular fire service journals supports this assessment. See, *Fire House Magazine*, or *Fire Engineering*, or the *National Fire Protection Association Journal*.

<sup>30</sup> This should not come as a great surprise. Until the early 80's, the fire service industry-wide culture placed a premium on “combar” experience and technical wherewithal. Touchy-feely managerial and administrative issues were considered anathema and, in many ways, counter to the spirit of the fire service which holds duty, honor and sacrifice as cultural pillars, (as opposed to planning and budgeting, etc.). The National Fire Protection Handbook, considered by many to be the “Bible” of the fire services, is predominantly technical..

administrative issues, however, these discussions are rarely based on comprehensive reviews of relevant literature and generally rely on practical experience rather than theoretical foundations. While this approach is accepted within the industry as a valid method for contributing to the overall base of knowledge, it doesn't provide confidence to a researcher seeking theoretical foundations to explain organizational phenomenon.<sup>31</sup>

Recognizing this limitation, the fire service literature is not expected to provide theoretical support to the conceptual framework drawn from this review. Rather, the literature is examined with the intent to identify existing discussions related to line-staff issues within the industry and to develop links, where possible, to the theoretical categories of group dynamics, power structures, and organizational culture.

### *Fire Department Structure*

Fire department structures vary depending on several variables, such as the size of the area protected, population of the area protected, type of occupancies protected, availability of funds, form of government, whether the department is fully paid or volunteer, etc. (NFPA Handbook, 1997) Further, fire departments can range in size from a single-station department staffed by volunteers and supported by community contributions, to a multi-station, fully paid department with general fund allocations in the millions.

In spite of the various sizes and forms of fire departments, there appears to be consensus on the structuration criteria which defines "line" and "staff." According to the NFPA Handbook, "Line" within the fire service refers to those functions that are "directly involved in fire suppression operations." (NFPA Handbook, 1997: 10-8) These functions are almost always associated with some form of round-the-clock shift work. "Staff" functions within the fire service are considered as "those activities that do not involve

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<sup>31</sup> For example, see Meyer, Steve; "Group Dynamics; Working Better Together," American Fire Journal, 1991. In this article, the author presents some interesting descriptions of group phenomenon but fails to explain the basis for his assertions. The reader is left wondering as to the validity of his claims.

dealing with day-to-day emergency incidents.” (NFPA Handbook, 1997: 10-8) These functions typically are associated with standard work schedules.

While these definitions are rather broad, the literature does recognize that staff positions tend to be held by high-ranking personnel: “At the highest officer levels within the department, line responsibilities diminish while staff responsibilities increase.” (NFPA, 1997: 10-8) This recognition in the literature may suggest that there is a structural power asymmetry that is systemic to industry accepted categorizations. Further, the literature recognizes that staff positions are typically administrative and support oriented and not directly related to emergency response. (NFPA, 1997)

Finally, there is consensus within the literature that fire service organizations are typically structured according to bureaucratic principles and place an emphasis on military rank systems and rigid hierarchies. (Cook, 1990; Grant, et. al., 1994)

### *Conflict within Fire Service Organizations*

Most discussions on conflict within the fire service literature center on labor/management relations. (Grant & Hoover, 1994; Coleman & Gravito, 1988) The literature does recognize that there is a traditional “chasm” between staff and line and attributes this to the relative desirability of positions within the two functional categorizations. As Paulsgrove notes, “Regrettably, while we present ourselves as a professional team in which all members are equally important to quality service delivery, there remains a wide chasm between the desirability of staff and field positions.” (Paulsgrove, 1992) Based on a national study of large metropolitan fire departments, Paulsgrove anecdotally verified that the desirability problem between staff and line positions is a cross-cutting issue within the fire service.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> While the desirability “chasm” between line and staff positions certainly contributes to group dynamics and conflict, it’s theoretical basis has not been investigated within this literature review. This literature review is intended to provide empirical and theoretical support to assist in understanding the relationship between functional categorizations. Only group phenomena that can be supported by the literature will be included in the conceptual framework for this study. Therefore, this study recognizes that a “desirability”

William Hewitt, in his text *Recreating the Fire Service*, allows that “strife” can exist in fire service organizations and manifest itself in a “we - them” confrontation. Hewitt does not, however, align this “strife” along any organizational or group boundary.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, John Cook suggests that counter-cultures may exist within fire service organizations and create conflict between groups. As Cook (1990: 90) notes, “Because each culture will have its own unique values and beliefs, the possibility for conflict is greatly increased.”

### ***Linking the Literature to the Research; Summary of the Findings***

It has been shown that organizational culture is a holistic construct which mirrors an organization's personality. Subcultures and counter-cultures exist in many organizations and are frequently in conflict with the supraculture -- these groups also define an organization's personality. Therefore, a rudimentary understanding of the theoretical foundations of organizational culture provides the necessary setting for an investigation into organizational conflict.

The literature on group dynamics has shown that the process of categorization is responsible for the formation of groups in organizations and that groups can be defined following simple criteria. Line and Staff are functional categorizations. It is therefore expected that these functional categorizations can be described through group processes. These groups, in turn, follow predictable psychological and sociological patterns that may lead to intergroup conflict. The literature also suggests that institutional inducements to conflict exist and that conflict in organizations may follow predictable patterns.

The literature on organizational-based power is vast and comprehensive, and flows from a variety of thematic and methodological approaches. The review of the power literature for this study focused on some of the structural characteristics of organizational power and how they influence, or are influenced by, group interaction. The literature

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issue exists within the fire service between line and staff but does not intend to measure it's effect on group conflict.

further shows that power asymmetries may be an endemic outcome of the structuration process and that measures of hierarchical power may be determined by the concept of meetings. Furthermore, the literature suggests that the degree of interconnectivity between organizational positions and groups contributes to an increase in power, and that power and decision making are related. Finally, there is overwhelming support in the literature that power asymmetry between groups leads to conflict.

The literature is also clear that the functional categorizations of “line” and “staff” exist within fire departments. The literature suggests that these categorizations are created according to roles and responsibilities and that different work schedules are related to the categorizations. Further, the literature allows that higher ranking personnel typically find themselves in staff positions. There is some acceptance within the literature that conflict exists in fire service organizations and that it may be related to line/staff issues. However, since this literature is not theoretically based, it is not intended to contribute to the conceptual framework advanced by this review.

### *Linking the Literature to the Research; Putting it All Together*

The purpose of this Literature Review is to provide theoretical support for an exploration into the Line-Staff relationship within the Austin Fire Department. The overall synthesis of the literature covered by this review suggests that **power relationships** and **group relationships** are synergistic and that a study of one necessarily constitutes a study of the other. Furthermore, the “personality” or “culture” of the organization influences, and is influenced by, group phenomena. Embedded within these three broad areas of scholarly inquiry rests a wealth of theoretical explanations for intra-organizational relations, (conflict). These theoretical explanations are extracted from the literature and a conceptual framework for the study is formed around them. The next section examines the conceptual framework designed for this study.

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<sup>31</sup> Of course, “strife” exists in all organizations and doesn’t always suggest conflict. See, Nelson, 1989,

## Conceptual Framework

### *Working Hypotheses:*

Working Hypotheses are favored in this study as it proposes to explore a phenomenon that is still in its conceptual infancy. Working Hypotheses compliment a budding investigation and serve as a starting point for future inquiry. According to Shields (1997), Working Hypotheses are useful, "...not because they are true or false, [but because] they lead to discovery of other critical facts." The Working Hypotheses designed for this study are not intended to be comprehensive, rather they are expected to test a series of possible explanations for organizational behavior. As has already been noted, this exploration into the Line-Staff relationship is based on a series of presuppositions: the presupposition that conflict is an inherent quality of this relationship. . .the presupposition that the above three scholarly categories are the most qualified candidates for examining this relationship, etc. Thus, this research is perfectly suited to a working hypotheses-based conceptual framework as it explores uncharted territory.

Table 3.1 displays the Working Hypotheses designed for this study and reveals their conceptual lineage:

**Table 3.1**  
Conceptual Lineage of Working Hypotheses

<b>Working Hypotheses</b>	<b>Field of Inquiry</b>	<b>Scholarly Support, Theoretical Basis</b>
<b>WH1:</b> <i>The structural categorizations of Line and Staff within the AFD constitute Groups.</i>	Group Dynamics	Clayton Alderfer (1977) Alvin Zandler (1977) Reed Nelson (1989) Roderick Kramer (1991)
<b>WH2a:</b> <i>Line and Staff within the AFD are in conflict due to goal inconsistencies between the two groups.</i>	Group Dynamics Power Structures Organizational Culture	Dean Tjstvold (1988/91) William Doise (1978) Reed Nelson (1989) Wilkins/Ouchi (1983) Roderick Kramer (1991) John Rehfuss (1989)
<b>WH2b:</b> <i>Line and Staff within the AFD are in conflict due to competition over resources.</i>	Group Dynamics Power Structures Organizational Culture	David Brown (1978) Dennis Mumby (1988) Reed Nelson (1989) Wilkins/Ouchi (1983) Roderick Kramer (1991)
<b>WH3a:</b> <i>Line and Staff within the AFD are in conflict due to strong within-group ties.</i>	Group Dynamics	Reed Nelson (1989) Clayton Alderfer (1977) Dennis Mumby (1988) Joan Rentsch (1990)
<b>WH3b:</b> <i>Line and Staff within the AFD are in conflict due to weak between-group ties.</i>	Group Dynamics	Reed Nelson (1989) Clayton Alderfer (1977) Dennis Mumby (1988) Joan Rentsch (1990)
<b>WH3c:</b> <i>Conflict between Line and Staff within the AFD is perpetuated by self-reinforcing behaviors.</i>	Group Dynamics	Joan Rentsch (1990) William Doise (1978) Dennis Mumby (1988) Reed Nelson (1989) Wilkins/Ouchi (1983) Roderick Kramer (1991) Irving Janus (1982) Dean Tjstvold (1988/91) Kenwyn Smith (1989)
<b>WH4:</b> <i>Line and Staff within the AFD are in conflict due to structural power asymmetries between the two groups.</i>	Power Structures Group Dynamics <sup>34</sup>	David Brown (1978) Astley, et.al., (1984) Dennis Mumby (1988) Stevenson, et.al. (1996) Anthony Cobb (1984) Alderfer/Smith (1982) Roderick Kramer (1991)

<sup>34</sup> Obviously, Organizational Culture, as a field of inquiry, is the common backdrop upon which all of the organizational dynamics being investigated rest. It is not included in some of the cells titled "Field of Inquiry" as the working hypotheses did not come from within the culture literature. Certainly, culture is an important element to a complete understanding of the Line-Staff relationship. While it doesn't hold a place of prominence in the operationalization of this research, *culture* does maintain a place of prominence in an understanding of the organization as an umbrella entity. It is for this reason that the culture literature is examined in such detail in the review of the literature.

**Working Hypothesis 1, (WH1):**

*The structural categorizations of "Line" and "Staff" within the Austin Fire Department constitute "Groups."*

If the Line-Staff relationship within the Austin Fire Department is to be explored in the context of group theory, it is necessary to draw a connection between the functional categorizations of "Line" and "Staff" and the definition of "Group." Without this initial connection, the subsequent Working Hypotheses that are extracted from group theory would be meaningless.

**Working Hypothesis 2a, (WH2a):**

*Line and Staff within the Austin Fire Department are in conflict due to goal inconsistencies between the two groups.*

**Working Hypothesis 2b, (WH2b):**

*Line and Staff within the Austin Fire Department are in conflict due to competition over resources.*

Linked because of their shared relationship to administrative issues (resources and goals), WH2a and WH2b propose to test structural/functional dimensions to the conflict dynamic. As was noted in the research purpose, the structural categorization of Line and Staff within the AFD models an industry prototype. Is conflict over goals and resources a result of the prototypical structural arrangement of Line and Staff? WH2a and WH2b explore this question.



**Working Hypothesis 3a, (WH3a):**

*Line and Staff within the Austin Fire Department are in conflict due to strong within-group ties.*

**Working Hypothesis 3b, (WH3b):**

*Line and Staff within the Austin Fire Department are in conflict due to weak between-group ties.*

**Working Hypothesis 3c, (WH3c):**

*Conflict between Line and Staff within the Austin Fire Department is perpetuated by self-reinforcing behaviors.*

Once the structural categorizations of Line and Staff are in place, do they set in motion dynamics that independently perpetuate conflict and schism? Linked because of their shared relationship to group theory vis-à-vis *group ties and cohesiveness*, WH3a, WH3b and WH 3c propose to test structural/phenomenological dimensions to the conflict dynamic. These hypotheses are considered important to a complete understanding of the Line-Staff relationship because evidence should reveal the pervasiveness of the conflict dynamic between Line and Staff within the department. Furthermore, WH3c explores whether conflict is fostered by the Line-Staff categorization, *independent of extraneous stimuli*.

**Working Hypothesis 4, (WH4):**

*Line and Staff within the Austin Fire Department are in conflict due to structural power asymmetries between the two groups.*

Power is central to studies of conflict. As a structural/phenomenological component to the conflict dynamic, WH4 proposes to measure whether the structural categorizations of Line and Staff create power asymmetries, or imbalances, between the two groups and whether this imbalance leads to conflict.

Using the scholarly categories of Organizational Culture, Group Dynamics and Power Structures as theoretical foundations, the above series of Working Hypotheses are designed to provide an introductory exploration into the Line-Staff relationship within the AFD. The existence of conflict is explored by these hypotheses. Moreover, the structuration scheme which created the functional categories of Line and Staff and its role in fostering conflict is examined. Group activity and the theories to support group action are central to the conceptualization of these hypotheses. The scholarly categories of organizational culture, group theory and power structures work synergistically to provide a theoretical basis for an introductory study into the Line-Staff relationship within the Austin Fire Department.

### *Summary*

Chapter Three has introduced the reader to the literature which supports this exploratory study. The scholarly categories of Culture, Groups Dynamics and Power Structures have been introduced as has the conceptual framework which has been extracted from them. In Chapter Four, the research methodology and operationalization tools designed for this study are presented.

## Chapter Four

### *Methodology*

According to Robert Yin (1994) there are five components to research design, they are: 1) a study's questions, 2) a study's propositions, 3) a study's unit(s) of analysis, 4) the logic linking the data to the propositions, and 5) the criteria interpreting the findings. Each component is sequential and necessary for the study to be complete. The first two components to this study's research design were discussed in Chapters Two and Three: the initial questions which motivated the study served as the basis for the propositions, or in this case -- the Working Hypotheses -- which were designed to explore the questions. The last three components to research design deal exclusively with methodology. **The following section discusses the research *methods* selected for this study.**

#### *Research Method*

The method of research selected for this investigation is the Case Study, (also referred to as *Field Research*). This method was selected for several reasons. First, and perhaps most importantly, case study research is well suited to a working hypotheses-based conceptual framework. As was noted in Chapter Three, Working Hypotheses serve as a launching pad for incipient investigations; it is implicit within the Working Hypotheses construct that initial theories and propositions may change to accommodate subsequent findings. Case study research is similar. As Earl Babbie (1992) suggests, "To the field researcher, the formulation of theoretical propositions, the observation of empirical events, and the evaluation of theory are typically all part of the same ongoing process. Although your actual field observations may be preceded by deductive theoretical formulas, you seldom if ever merely test a theory and let it go at that." Thus, case study research provides a methodological approach that is friendly to original inquiry.

Furthermore, case studies are intrinsically bonded to contextual-based studies of real-life phenomena. As Yin notes (1994), “[A] case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.” Obviously, any investigation into the nature of intra-organizational relations within the Austin Fire Department is, de facto, contextual. The nature of the relationship and the group phenomena associated with it exist *only* within the confines of the organizational setting. Thus, the context-oriented nature of field research renders it a good candidate for this methodology.

Finally, case study research is appropriate for investigations that deal with “what” questions that concern contemporary events over which the researcher has no control. (Yin, 1994) The essence of the question being posed by this study -- *What* is the nature of the Line-Staff relationship within the AFD? -- qualifies under these criteria. Moreover, the relationship between the functional groups of Line and Staff is contemporary, and the dynamics of this relationship are well out of control of the researcher. Thus, this investigation meets the specified acceptable criteria for a case study design.

There are numerous advantages to employing case study research. Case studies provide an opportunity for the researcher to immerse himself in the natural setting of the object/phenomenon being observed. This activity is referred to as *participant observation*, and it allows the researcher to develop a deep and full understanding of the study. This “depth of meaning,” according to Earl Babbie, provides strength in validity to case study research. Also, case study research is flexible and it allows the researcher to accommodate subsequent findings which may alter initial propositions. As was noted above, this is an important element when operating within the conceptual framework of Working Hypotheses. Finally, case study research is extremely well suited to investigations of *relationships, groups and organizations*, as it can be used to explore attitudes and

behaviors within their natural setting, as opposed to, say, artificial experimental design. (Babbie, 1992)

Among its disadvantages, case study research has been accused of lacking strength in generalizability and reliability. Due to its personal nature, it can be argued, case study findings represent snap shots of individual phenomena and therefore aren't relevant to the general population.<sup>1</sup> (Babbie, 1992; also Yin, 1992) However, Robert Yin notes that case study research can make contributions to analytical generalizability: "...case studies, like experiments, are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes. In this sense, the case study, like the experiment, does not represent a 'sample,' and the investigator's goal is to expand and generalize theories (analytic generalization)." Thus, case study research may advance theoretical understandings which may be, themselves, generalizable to other populations.

#### *Sources of Evidence & Units of Analysis*

The population for this study consists of all uniformed personnel within the Austin Fire Department. There are a number civilian employees within the AFD, however, this employee population will not be represented in the sample frame as they do not share in Line responsibilities.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This is certainly a compelling argument against Case Study research. However, in the context of this study, this argument may not be fully operative. To the extent that fire departments across the country are structured similar to the Austin Fire Department, if it can be demonstrated that the structuration process itself induces conflict, will this study be generalizable. Indeed, it was this similarity between the structuration schema of fire departments across the globe (as most departments model the prototype) that compelled this researcher to begin this investigation.

<sup>2</sup> Civilian *professionals* are a relatively new addition to the fire service. While civilians have always been employed in administrative support positions, modern trends are toward employment of civilian professionals to specialize in staff-related functions. From fire protection engineers to hazardous materials engineers to finance and plans specialists, progressive departments are experiencing an inflow of non-uniformed specialists to meet the ever increasing administrative demands of the expanding fire service mission. Interestingly, the relationship between all uniformed personnel (both line and staff) and civilian professionals provides a *complete study in itself* with inherent conflict and schism, (this relationship is not examined in this study). In fact, the overall intra-organizational conflict dynamic within the AFD is reminiscent of the Arabic maxim, *Brother against brother; brothers against cousin; brothers and cousins against outsiders*.

To test the working hypotheses, this study employs four methods of data collection: *focus group, survey, document analysis and participant as observer*. By combining these methods, the strengths of each are joined and a synthesis is developed. This combination should provide a comprehensive examination into the nature of the Line-Staff relationship within the AFD.

#### *Focus Group:*

This study investigates organizational relations as they exist between groups and group dynamics are central to the foundation of the working hypotheses designed for this inquiry. Thus, the nature of the phenomenon being investigated by this study is well suited to focus group research as this form of research is, at heart, an examination of *group* behavior. (Morgan, 1988) Focus group research allows group individuals to interact and respond to others points of view, enabling group dynamics to take hold and run their course. This synergy of interaction is essential to the quality of the evidence.

Focus group research is a form of qualitative analysis. According to Babbie, qualitative analysis is "...The non-numerical examination and interpretation of observations, for the purpose of discovering underlying meanings and patterns of relationships." (Babbie, 1992) This research is intended to explore "underlying meanings and patterns" behind the Line-Staff relationship within the AFD; thus, qualitative research is the primary form of analysis for this study. Likewise, focus groups are the apparent method of data collection because they allow an examination into "underlying meanings and patterns."

#### *Survey:*

There is a strong argument within the literature that qualitative methods, in order to be valid, require supplementation with quantitative methodologies. While it may appear counterintuitive to employ a quantitative instrument on such an arguably qualitative study, it

is nevertheless possible to operationalize the working hypotheses for this study in such a way that they may be tested quantitatively.<sup>3</sup> There are a number of quantitative methodologies available, however, one of the most popular for studying social phenomena and the one selected for this study is the self-administered questionnaire.

Since there exists the possibility of bias in focus group research, the self-administered questionnaire may provide greater validity to the study's findings as it eliminates any contact-oriented interviewer bias. Furthermore, questionnaires allow one to draw conclusions on large populations based on data drawn from smaller samples, making it an efficient form of data collection. (Babbie, 1992)

#### *Participant as Observer:*

The third method for collecting and organizing evidence for this study is an accepted field research practice referred to as *Participant as Observer*. (Babbie, 1992) Essentially, this method allows the researcher to draw on experience, observation and intuition to guide the inquiry, while still maintaining scholastic detachment. According to Shields (forthcoming), *experience* serves as the key bridge that connects theory into reality. By drawing on the researcher's 13 years of *experience* within the organization of study, red herrings and tangential deviations from the conceptual framework may be avoided. For example, focus group discussions may be conducted based on the researcher's experience on what cues generate previously observed group phenomena;<sup>4</sup> or, organizational documents that the researcher has previously identified as relevant to the study may be examined. Furthermore, through the concept of *participant as observer*, experience and observation may be drawn upon during the **analysis** of evidence.

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<sup>3</sup> For more information on the operationalization of the working hypotheses, see Table 4.1.

<sup>4</sup> This is NOT to suggest that the researcher intends to "steer" the discussion. Rather, it suggests that the researcher may draw upon experience, intuition and observation to initiate group responses. As has already been noted in previous chapters, the researcher relied on experience and observation to draw initial presuppositions on the nature of the Line-Staff relationship. Participant as Observer is simply an extension of this initial research method.

### *Document Analysis:*

The analysis of Organizational documents provide additional evidence to test working hypotheses. As an additional method to achieve research triangulation, documents may reveal evidence to support observed phenomena. Only one AFD document is examined for this study -- the formal **Organizational Chart**.

### *Methods: Summary*

By utilizing multiple forms of data collection, the strength of the study's findings is enhanced and possible conceptual or operational errors are revealed. As Earl Babbie has noted, "[B]ecause each research method has strengths and weaknesses, there is always a danger that research findings will reflect, at least in part, the method of inquiry." (Babbie, 1992; p. 109) In order to avoid methodological weaknesses, and recognizing that the researcher is an active member of the observed organization -- and therefore subject to many of the group processes discussed in Chapter Three -- multiple methods of inquiry have been designed for this study. A redundancy in methodological processes should reduce claims of researcher bias.

### *Operationalization:*

*Operationalization* considers Yin's "linking the data to the propositions;" it is the process by which abstract constructs become distilled into real-life considerations. Or as Babbie suggests, "...operationalization is the development of specific research procedures that will result in empirical observations representing those concepts in the real world." (Babbie, 1992) The literature supports a number of different ways in which the Working Hypotheses for this study may be operationalized. Various propositions are advanced within the literature as operative indicators of group phenomena. In order to test the working hypotheses for this study, only those indicators that were considered most



relevant to the research question were selected. Table 4.1 reviews the working hypotheses for this study and links them to operationalization indicators.

**Table 4.1**  
Operationalization of Working Hypotheses to  
Examine Line-Staff Conflict

<b>Working Hypotheses</b>	<b>Field of Inquiry</b>	<b>Scholarly Support</b>	<b>Research Method</b>	<b>Operationalization Indicator(s)</b>
<b>WH1: Groups</b>	Group Theory	Clayton Alderfer (1982)	* Focus Group * Survey Research	Employee recognition of group participation
<b>WH2a: Goal Inconsistencies</b>	Group Theory	Dean Tjssvold (1988/91)	* Survey Research * Focus Group * Participant-observer	Perception of Goal-Hierarchy; Mission incongruency
<b>WH2b: Competition over Resources</b>	Group Theory Power Structures	Roderick Kramer (1991), David Brown (1978)	* Survey Research * Focus Group * Participant-observer	Perception of access to "Information" as "Resources;" Budget Authority as "Resource"
<b>WH3a: Strong Within-Group Ties</b>	Group Theory	Reed Nelson (1989); Clayton Alderfer (1977); Joan Rentsch, (1990)	* Survey Research * Focus Group * Participant-observer	Level of Contact & Interaction Within and Between Groups; Friendship, Reciprocity and Frequency as qualities of interaction; Favors
<b>WH3b: Weak Between-Group Ties</b>	Group Theory	Reed Nelson (1989) Clayton Alderfer (1977); Joan Rentsch, (1990)	* Survey Research * Focus Group * Participant-observer	Level of Contact & Interaction Within and Between Groups; Friendship, Reciprocity and Frequency as qualities of interaction; Favors
<b>WH3c: Self-reinforcing Behaviors</b>	Group Theory	Joan Rentsch (1990); Irving Janus (1982); David Brown (1978)	* Survey Research * Focus Group * Participant-observer	Interpretation of Organizational Events; Group Stereotyping; Mobilization of Bias; Ethnocentricity
<b>WH4: Power Asymmetries</b>	Power Structures	Dennis Mumby (1988); Astley et.al. (1984)	* Survey Research * Focus Group * Participant-observer * Document Analysis	Participation in Meetings; Network Centrality; Workflow Linkages

**WH1:** *The structural categorizations of “Line” and “Staff” within the Austin Fire Department constitute “Groups.”*

The literature on group theory is quite permissive regarding the definition of “group.”<sup>5</sup> Recognizing this, an initial survey question will ask whether the employee is a member of Line or Staff. By answering this question, the employee, de facto, recognizes a separation and participation in functional categories. This recognition alone, according to the literature, infers “group” existence. Focus Group results are also examined to reveal evidence of Line and Staff recognition of group participation.

**WH2a:** *Line and Staff within the Austin Fire Department are in conflict due to goal inconsistencies between the two groups.*

**WH2b:** *Line and Staff within the Austin Fire Department are in conflict due to competition over resources.*

In the questionnaire and method, WH 2a is tested according to an ordinal measurement which ranks department goals within two constructs: *department goals as they exist*, and *department goals as they should be*. The focus group method examines additional indicators of goal-incompatibility. Working Hypothesis 2b is operationalized by exploring group perceptions on *access to information* and is tested utilizing both the focus group and survey methods.

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<sup>5</sup> For more information on “group” definitions in the relevant literature, see the section on Group Dynamics in Chapter 3.

**WH3a:** *Line and Staff within the Austin Fire Department are in conflict due to strong within-group ties.*

**WH3b:** *Line and Staff within the Austin Fire Department are in conflict due to weak between-group ties.*

**WH3c:** *Conflict between Line and Staff within the Austin Fire Department is perpetuated by self-reinforcing behaviors.*

Working hypotheses 3a and 3b are tested according to the following three concepts: 1) *reciprocity, friendship and frequency* as qualities of interaction, 2) levels of *contact and interaction* within and between the functional groups of Line and Staff, and 3) tendencies to *do favors* for within-group or out-group members. Both the survey and focus group methods are used to establish evidence for these hypotheses. Working Hypothesis 3c is tested within both the focus group and questionnaire methods and is examined by exploring group tendencies to *stereotype* out-group members, indications of *mobilization of bias*, and *ethnocentricity*. Furthermore, group *perceptions on organizational events* are examined within the focus group research.

**WH 4:** *Line and Staff within the Austin Fire Department are in conflict due to structural power asymmetries between the two groups.*

Working hypothesis 4 is tested utilizing all four research methods and is operationalized by employing the four indicators of *hierarchy, meetings, network centrality and workflow linkages*. Hierarchy and consolidation of positions of rank and authority are explored through an examination of the AFD Organizational Chart . The indicators of meetings and workflow linkages are explored through the questionnaire. Finally, the concept of network centrality is explored in the focus group setting.

### *Operationalizing the Focus Group(s):*

All of the Working Hypotheses are directly or indirectly operationalized in focus group discussions. Since time is an obvious barrier to a complete and thorough discussion of all the working hypotheses, a series of four questions has been developed in order to stimulate discussion on relevant issues.<sup>6</sup> The conceptual framework designed for this study is synergistic -- one working hypotheses necessarily flows into another, which in turn, affects others, and so on. They are imbedded concepts. Therefore, it is assumed that a series of four questions designed to generate discussion on selected, relevant and literature-supported issues will lead into tangential discussions of other related concepts. Table 4.2 reviews the focus group operationalization concept. Working Hypotheses in bold in Table 4.2 indicate a facilitator priority for that question. For an elaborated presentation of the focus group questions, see the Focus Group Transcripts in Appendices B and C.

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<sup>6</sup> Focus Group participants were promised a 1-hour maximum time limit on focus group meetings. This was necessary in order to get the desired level of participation.

**Table 4.2**  
Focus Group Operationalization

<b>Focus Group Topic</b>	<b>Working Hypotheses</b>	<b>Operationalization Indicator</b>
Perception of Conflict between Line and Staff	WH 2-a, WH 2-b <b>WH3-a, WH 3-b,</b> <b>WH 3-c, WH 4</b>	Group Stereotyping and Consensus-building; Contact and Interaction; Mobilization of Bias; Ethnocentricity
Perception of Goal/Mission Compatibility between Line and Staff	<b>WH 2-a,</b> WH3-a, WH 3-b, <b>WH 3-c</b>	Perception of Goal Compatibility
Perception of Level of Involvement of Line and Staff based on 4-part Definition of "In The Loop" (re: transcripts)	WH 2-a, WH 2-b <b>WH3-a, WH 3-b,</b> <b>WH 3-c, WH 4</b>	Contact and Interaction; Friendship and Reciprocity; Network Centrality and Workflow Linkages, Group Stereotyping; Meetings; Hierarchy
Perception of Organizational Event (AFD New Hiring Process)	<b>WH3-a, WH 3-b,</b> <b>WH 3-c</b>	Interpretation of Organizational Events; Group Stereotyping; Contact and Interaction

#### *Implementation of Focus Group Research*

Two focus groups were conducted for this study. Participants were extracted from the separate sampling frames of *Line Uniformed Personnel* and *Staff Uniformed Personnel*. One focus group was composed of only Line personnel, the other only Staff. The unit of analysis for each focus group was the group itself. Selection of focus group participants followed Earl Babbie's notion of "purposeful sample," that is, participants were selected on an "intuitive feel," based on observation and experience, as to their representativeness of the sampling frame.<sup>7</sup> A free atmosphere of input and interaction,

<sup>7</sup> Huh? Perhaps an explanation is necessary. A random selection of focus group participants might not yield a true representative body. For example, a 10-participant, Line focus group, selected randomly, might

aligned along a set of four probing and thoughtful questions drawn from the conceptual framework, were taped and transcribed. Sources of evidence for the study were extracted from the transcripts of the focus group events.

In the preamble to the focus group discussions, participants were briefly introduced to the nature of the study and to the fundamental presupposition of conflict, although it was stressed that there were no preconceived “conclusions” driving the investigation. Participants were encouraged to be candid and honest with their thoughts, feelings and opinions regarding the areas of discussion. Group discussions were allowed to deviate from the topical areas when, in the opinion of the researcher, they were either directly or indirectly related to the conceptual framework for this study. Due to the revealing nature of some of the dialogue (or potential dialogue), participant anonymity was assured.

#### *Operationalizing the Questionnaire:*

Each question within the survey propose to measure one of the operationalization indicators extracted from the conceptual framework. For each question there is a corresponding conceptual flow, including *Field of Inquiry*, *Working Hypotheses* and *Operationalization Indicator(s)*. Table 4.1 reviews this flow. Table 4.3 Links this flow to the corresponding questionnaire items.

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produce a focus group of 10 Tailboardmen (a rank within the AFD--the lowest). This focus group would not be representative of the Line makeup as there are a number of different ranks, positions and assignments. By selecting individual participants, the researcher is able to develop a representative body which mirrors (as best as possible) the sampling frame. Furthermore, the researcher is able to select participants that, based on experience, would be willing to contribute and who would find the experience interesting (essential elements to valid focus group participation, see Morgan, 1988).

**Table 4.3**  
Operationalization of Working Hypotheses  
in Questionnaire Instrument

<b>Survey Question</b>	<b>Working Hypotheses</b>	<b>Operationalization Indicator(s) (Variables)</b>
Question 1: "Group ID"	WH 1: <i>Groups</i>	Recognition of Functional Separation
Question 2: "Involvement"	WH 4: <i>Power</i>	Participation in Decisions
Question 3: "Involvement"	WH 4: <i>Power</i>	Participation in Decisions
Question 4: "Involvement"	WH 4: <i>Power</i>	Participation in Decisions
Question 5: "Information"	WH 2b: <i>Resources</i>	Information as Resource
Question 6: "Information"	WH 2b: <i>Resources</i>	Information as Resource
Question 7: "Budget"	WH 2b: <i>Resources</i>	Budget Authority as Resource
Question 8: "Interaction"	WH 3a: <i>Strong in-gp Ties</i> WH 3b: <i>Weak bt-gp Ties</i>	Frequency of Interaction Staff
Question 9: "Interaction"	WH 3a: <i>Strong in-gp Ties</i> WH 3b: <i>Weak bt-gp Ties</i>	Frequency of Interaction Line
Question 10: "Contact"	WH 3a: <i>Strong in-gp Ties</i> WH 3b: <i>Weak bt-gp Ties</i>	Frequency of Contact -- Staff
Question 11: "Contact"	WH 3a: <i>Strong in-gp Ties</i> WH 3b: <i>Weak bt-gp Ties</i>	Frequency of Contact -- Line
Question 12: "Quality"	WH 3a: <i>Strong in-gp Ties</i> WH 3b: <i>Weak bt-gp Ties</i>	Friendship and Reciprocity Staff
Question 13: "Quality"	WH 3a: <i>Strong in-gp Ties</i> WH 3b: <i>Weak bt-gp Ties</i>	Friendship and Reciprocity Line
Question 14a: "Favors"	WH 3a: <i>Strong in-gp Ties</i> WH 3b: <i>Weak bt-gp Ties</i>	Reciprocity Staff
Question 14b: "Favors"	WH 3a: <i>Strong in-gp Ties</i> WH 3b: <i>Weak bt-gp Ties</i>	Reciprocity Line
Question 15: "Stereotype"	WH 3c: <i>Self-reinforcing Behaviors</i>	Group Stereotype of Non-group Line
Question 16: "Stereotype"	WH 3c: <i>Self-reinforcing Behaviors</i>	Group Stereotype of Non-group Staff
Question 17: "Work Links"	WH 4: <i>Power</i>	Workflow Linkages, Network Centrality
Question 18: "Meetings"	WH 4: <i>Power</i>	Meetings as Power
Question 19: "Connection"	WH 4: <i>Power</i>	Network Centrality, Information as Power
Exercise: "Goals"	WH 2a: <i>Goal Inconsistencies</i>	Perception of Goal Hierarchy

### *Implementation of Questionnaire*

A brief, four-page, self-administered questionnaire supplements the focus group research for this study, (see Appendix A). Quota samplings (proportionate to rank) of 50 Staff members and 50 Line members constitute the sample group. Within the quota, samplings are random. The individual employee is the unit of analysis in this method of data collection. By utilizing the individual as the unit of analysis, inferential reasoning is employed to draw conclusions about group phenomenon.

There are six operative ranks within the Line Division of the Austin Fire Department. Since the highest rank -- Division Chief -- represents only three personnel, this rank was removed from the available Line sampling frame. The remaining ranks of Battalion Chief through Firefighter were separated by rank within the department's data base. Random sorts within each rank field were conducted within the data-base. The top ten random selections within each rank were selected to receive questionnaires, resulting in 50 possible respondents, 10 from each rank within the frame.

Since there exists no similar rank-oriented disposition within the Staff functional category, a random sort of all uniformed personnel within the Staff division was conducted. The top fifty personnel on the list, excluding members of the Executive Staff, were selected to receive the questionnaire.

The self-administered questionnaire was distributed via interoffice mail on September 7, 1997. Respondents were advised to return the questionnaire to AFD Headquarters through the interoffice mail system. By October 1, eighty questionnaires had been returned, 47 from Staff and 33 from Line, constituting an 80% return rate. Due to time constraints imposed by the research process, no surveys were accepted after October 1. Therefore, the questionnaire data is drawn from an 80% respondent population.

An arbitrary, weighted scale with values ranging from negative 2 to positive 2 allows the computation of statistical values. This weighted scale allows questionnaire findings to be presented relationally. Participants were asked to choose from one of the 5



following anchored responses: Never -- (-2); Rarely -- (-1); Sometimes -- (0); Frequently -- (1); Always -- (2).<sup>8</sup>

### *Summary*

In Chapter Four, the reader has been introduced to the research methods for this study. The method of *Field Research* along with the proposed data collection tools of *Focus Group*, *Self-administered Questionnaire*, *Participant as Observer* and *Document Analysis* have been examined. Strengths and weaknesses of the proposed methods have been discussed. Finally, the procedures for operationalizing the conceptual framework, along with the related indicators have been presented and linked to the relevant literature. In Chapter Five, the reader is introduced to the organization of study -- the Austin Fire Department. Specific statistical and descriptive qualities of the department are presented along with a brief chronicling of contemporary events which define the organization.

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<sup>8</sup> This researcher is aware that these responses do not square with traditional Likert-type models. Furthermore, it is questionable whether the assignment of values to each response agree with a true mathematical/logical interpretation; i.e., how was it determined that the ordinal response "Sometimes" has a value of zero? Moreover, is the value-distance between "Rarely" and "Sometimes" equal to the distance between "Sometimes" and "Frequently?" Is "Never" the negative polar of "Always" or is it the zero value on a positive scale? This researcher recognizes the possibility of mathematical error in the assignment of these values. However, the responses for this questionnaire were assigned polar values so that the findings might be presented *relationally* -- to allow for a more meaningful representation of the Line-Staff results. It is assumed that a response of "sometimes" is essentially meaningless -- that it represents a no-value response upon which to test the working hypotheses for this study. What can be learned from the neutral response of "sometimes?" Therefore, this response was assigned the zero value and subsequent responses were assigned polar values from this neutral point. While statistical significance will not be computed for this study, the Mean distributions drawn from this assignment of values do provide insight into the Line-Staff questionnaire responses.

## Chapter Five

### *Setting*

#### *Austin*

Situated along the Colorado River at the foot of the Texas Hill Country, the City of Austin spans 225.4 square miles and maintains an average population of 567, 600 citizens, ranking it the fifth largest city in the state and the 27th largest city in the nation. Within Austin's three-county Municipal Statistical Area, including Travis, Hays and Williamson counties, the approximate population is 1,026,299. According to 1990 Census data, the demographic make-up of the City of Austin is approximately 62 percent white, 23 percent Hispanic, 11 percent Black and 3 percent Asian. Known for its eclectic and progressive personality -- with such hallmarks as the commonly cited "Live Music Capital of the World" -- the City of Austin is frequently cited as one of the most favored cities to live in. With several different colleges and universities to supply an educated work-force, Austin is experiencing a significant increase in business relocation. Indeed, considered by many to be the new "Silicon Valley," and boasting such multinational-national corporations as Samsung, Motorola, 3M, Advanced Micro Devices, Texaco and Dell Computer, to name only a few, Austin is rapidly becoming a major player in the silicon wafer and high tech industrial arena.<sup>1</sup>

The City of Austin maintains a Council-Manager form of government. Hired by the seven council members, including the Mayor, the City Manager is charged with the day-to-day administration of the city's departments and is responsible for managing the 1.379 Billion dollar annual budget.<sup>2</sup> Four Assistant City Managers, appointed by the City Manager, oversee the 26 various city departments.<sup>3</sup> Department Heads are appointed by

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<sup>1</sup> All of the data discussed in this paragraph was extracted from the Austin City Connection web page and related links. See, [www.ci.austin.tx.us](http://www.ci.austin.tx.us) for more information and related links.

<sup>2</sup> This information was acquired by phone from the City's Budget Office.

<sup>3</sup> One of these four is assigned specifically to the administration of the new Austin-Bergstrom International Airport.

the City Manager, subject to Council approval, and report directly to the Assistant City Managers.

### *The Fire Department*

The Austin Fire Department is under the authority of one Fire Chief and four Assistant Fire Chiefs. The Chief of the department is appointed at large by the City Manager and the four Assistant Chiefs are appointed from within the ranks by the Fire Chief -- this constitutes the "Command Staff" of the department. The AFD maintains approximately 900 uniformed, civil service employees and approximately 61 civilian employees.<sup>4</sup> With an annual budget of 57 million dollars, the AFD is considered to be one of the largest of the city's departments. In addition to the 225.4 square miles of incorporated city limits that the department is charged with protecting, the AFD maintains seven first-responder mutual aid contracts with surrounding Emergency Service Districts and Volunteer Departments. In the 1995-96 Fiscal Year, the AFD responded to approximately 33,000 emergency events, one-half of which were pre-hospital emergency medical care calls. It is expected that the department will respond to over 40,000 emergency calls in the 96-97 Fiscal Year. The Austin Fire Department supports 35 Fire Stations, 6 separate administrative offices and over 85 emergency response vehicles.<sup>5</sup>

### *Organizational Structure*

To the uninitiated, the Organizational Structure within the AFD may appear confusing, (see Appendix D).<sup>6</sup> From looking at the Organizational Chart, the distinctions

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<sup>4</sup> These numbers are approximates as they are always changing due to attrition, hiring, etc. These data were gathered from the AFD Administration Section.

<sup>5</sup> This information was extracted from the Austin City Connection, World Wide Web page at, [www.ci.austin.tx.us/fire/fdfacts.htm](http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/fire/fdfacts.htm).

<sup>6</sup> It even appears confusing to the initiated. Within the past three years, the organizational structure of the Austin Fire Department underwent three separate, *significant* organizational restructurings. As can be noted by reviewing the transcripts from the Focus Groups (see Appendices B and C), even AFD personnel don't know who to call anymore when they need in-house administrative assistance. Similar to the famous adage

between the functional categorizations of Line and Staff are not clear; however, in practice, they are quite easily identified. Simply put, any emergency response function that requires a 24 hour on, 48 hour off shift rotation is considered *Line*. Any non-emergency response, support function that requires a standard 40 hour-per week schedule is considered *Staff*.<sup>7</sup>

The Line arm of the AFD is rather simple structurally and consists of a hierarchical pyramid of 6 levels of ranks and four levels of successive command.<sup>8</sup> The Line Division is separated into three shifts, A, B and C, each on a 24 hour rotation and under the authority of one Division Chief. Each shift is separated into 6 geographically distinct Battalions. The six battalions within the Line Division are divided according to response districts and number of stations within the geographical area, and are under the authority of one Battalion Chief. On average, each battalion maintains 6 fire stations and approximately 40 uniformed personnel. Within the battalions, Captains oversee individual Companies and "Captain-School Districts" -- training districts of two or more stations -- and Lieutenants are in charge of Engine Companies. Other than three Special Operations Teams -- Hazardous Materials, Dive Rescue and Technical Rescue -- the Line Division within AFD possesses no separate sections or ancillary divisions. Of the approximately 900 uniformed personnel employed by the AFD, 90% of them are assigned to the Line Division.

The Staff arm of the Austin Fire Department is significantly more complex than the Line Division. Numerous Sections, Bureaus, and ancillary Divisions are subsumed within the Staff functional category, such as the Prevention Bureau, Investigations Section, Public Education Section, Fleet Maintenance, Training Division, etc. While the Staff Division employs only approximately 10 percent of the department's uniformed personnel, it retains

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regarding Austin weather, AFD employees have been wont to say, "If you don't know who to call, wait a minute, it will change."

<sup>7</sup> Of course, and as you would expect, there are exceptions to this simple rule. Within the AFD, there is the Staff Section of Investigations. Fire and Arson Investigators maintain a combination 24 hour shift rotation schedule with a 40 hour-week schedule so that they may be on call to support Line officers with fire cause determinations. These officers are considered Staff as their role is one of support. Also, fire dispatchers work shift rotations, but are considered Staff personnel. The distinction of Line and Staff according to shift or non-shift schedules is fairly universal. See for example, Paulsgrove, NFPA, 1994.

<sup>8</sup> The 6 ranks are: Division Chief; Battalion Chief; Captain; Lieutenant; Specialist; and Firefighter.

all of the department's civilian personnel and *each* member of the department's Command Staff. Thus, the policy making body of the organization is completely included within the Staff Division.

Uniformed personnel are assigned to the Staff Division as they progress through the rank structure of the department. As personnel promote to successive ranks they are frequently rotated into and out of Staff positions, hence, many employees, through the course of their career, will "revolve" in and out of a Staff assignment.<sup>9</sup> Within each of the separate sections, bureaus and sub-divisions, the existing rank structure, in various configurations, is maintained. Ultimately, the head of the various sections, bureaus and sub-divisions report directly to an Assistant Chief of the department.

### *Organizational Dynamics*

As was noted in Chapter Two, modern trends in the fire service -- and in public administration in general -- have demanded a new look at service delivery traditions. The Austin Fire Department, in the past 15 years, has risen to this new public service challenge and established itself, by many standards, as an industry leader in innovative service delivery.<sup>10</sup> Recognizing that fire suppression and emergency mitigation are necessarily reactive in nature and not in the best interest of a tax-paying public, in the early 1990's the AFD introduced a dramatic change in the traditional response-oriented mission of the department. This new vision heralds *emergency prevention* and *hazard intervention* as its key philosophical elements. Indeed, the AFD's current Vision Statement reads that it is...

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<sup>9</sup> While it is not directly related to this research, this "revolving door" method of selection for Staff positions is considered within the industry to be a serious impediment to departments as it tends to stunt position memory. Just as officers build the confidence and knowledge-base to sufficiently carry out the duties of their assigned Staff positions, they frequently promote or transfer out; thus requiring the process to begin again. For more information, see Paulsgrove, 1992.

<sup>10</sup> In response to the call for personalized customer service and efficient use of the public dollar, the AFD initiated a Total Quality Management program that ultimately earned it the Austin Quality Award for Highest Achievement in Customer Service. Austin Fire Department initiatives are frequently published in trade journals and state-wide periodicals and Austin Fire Chiefs are often sought out for public speaking engagements. For years running, the AFD has been voted Most Favorite Public Department by citizens of Austin.

“An organization that provides a broad menu of safety services, *focusing on emergency prevention* while maintaining a reliable and effective emergency response capability.”

(1997 Action Report, AFD internal publication; Emphasis added.) This innovative rethinking of the traditional, if parochial, response-centered vision of the fire department essentially flipped the cart ahead of the proverbial horse and in so doing, dashed traditional views regarding the AFD’s mission against the crushing tide of change.<sup>11</sup> With this change came a significant rise in Staff related functions to assist in the prevention mission as well as numerous restructurings of the Staff arm of the department.

Moreover, as technologies in automatic fire suppression, building design, and materials processing continue to improve, coupled to aggressive fire department hazard intervention, the number and severity of structure fires should fall within the City of Austin. Understandably, city managers and council members are hesitant to approve funding for a “Fire” department that doesn’t respond to many “Fires.” Hence, like any organization experiencing environmental change, the AFD leadership has scanned the horizon and recognized that while the incidence of fire may be receding, the need to provide emergency medical care has remained constant. Thus, the department has recently turned to pre-hospital emergency care as a means to re-acquire market share in the emergency response business.<sup>12</sup> This new commitment has introduced an increased amount of

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<sup>11</sup> In fact, the AFD Fire Chief (former) has been known to refer to Line operations as the “safety net” upon which the city may fall *in the event the prevention mission fails*. This characterization of “Safety Net,” while both accurate and reflective of the department’s refocus, may suggest a second-class status for Operations (Line) functions. Even though the Fire Chief obviously did not intend to denigrate Line personnel or the Line mission of response, this epithet, by its very nature promotes a primary-secondary mission status for the functional groups of Staff and Line. Even though Line personnel are becoming increasingly more involved in fire prevention efforts, they do not see that as their primary role (re: Operations Focus Group transcript, Appendix C). In this researcher’s experience, the characterization of “Safety Net” has developed a perceptual wedge between Line members and the Command Staff (if not Staff in general). Line firefighters can often be heard passionately mocking each other with statements such as: “You’re just a Safety Net,” and the like.

<sup>12</sup> The AFD is an anomaly within the fire service industry when it comes to its emergency medical role. Most large municipal departments are combined fire and EMS agencies. Both the firefighters and the paramedics work for the “Fire” department and serve in dual-capacities. In Austin, the Emergency Medical Service is a separate city department. Traditionally, the Austin Fire Department’s role in pre-hospital emergency care has been limited to a “first-responder” capacity, which includes life-saving medical intervention for life-threatening medical emergencies only. Since the AFD has a quicker response time to

attention to the department's pre-hospital care mission, including new and advanced training requirements and equipment, an expanded response role, and aggressive partnering with Austin EMS. While this change is objectively necessary, it does constitute a fundamental organizational shift away from the traditional role of the department.

The Austin Fire Department is an organization experiencing change. The 1990's have seen a tremendous re-thinking of the department's traditional public role; this rethinking has initiated numerous efforts to re-engineer the department to favor its new vision(s). New initiatives, policies, programs and philosophies are introduced regularly and the organizational chart is frequently modified to fit the evolving organization. The multiple changes and their supporting philosophies, it can be argued, have been both progressive and necessary. However, in an industry that values *tradition* as highly as the Fire Service, such rapid and aggressive change may result in profound and unpredictable behavior. The changes may be perceived as threatening and subsequently create a culture of uncertainty and unpredictability. Organizational conflict may emerge.

### *Summary*

This chapter has introduced the reader to the City of Austin, its demographics, personality and form of government. The reader has also been introduced to the Austin Fire Department, which serves as the object of this study. The structuration of the functional categories of Line and Staff have been discussed as well as the overall organizational structure of the Austin Fire Department. It has been shown that the AFD is experiencing change, both in vision and in mission; a brief introduction to these changes

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locations within the city than EMS, fire units will respond to medical calls, begin care and await the arrival of EMS paramedics. The paramedics, upon arrival, take over care of the patient and transport if necessary. Thus, the traditional AFD role has been one of support for Austin's EMS agency. This minimal medical role within the pre-hospital care system fostered, it can be argued, a departmental culture which promoted "fire" as the central mission of the department. Indeed, many firefighters consider the increased medical role of the department as a threat. It is common to hear firefighters complain that they did not hire on to be "Doctors," but rather, "Firefighters." Arguably, this is a myopic view, however, the department's culture has historically supported a limited medical response role and the new changes are forcing a cultural re-shifting.

has been introduced. In Chapter Six, the results of the exploration into the Line-Staff relationship within the AFD is presented.



## Chapter Six

### *Findings*

This chapter presents the results of the focus group(s) research, the self-administered questionnaire and the document analysis. Findings are presented sequentially, categorized according to working hypotheses. The results from the focus group research are presented first. At times, the focus group analysis centers more on the dynamics of group interaction rather than the actual dialogue. This is necessary because group phenomena related group cohesiveness, ethnocentrism and mobilization of bias are revealed more by observations of group dynamics than analysis of spoken content, (for a thorough presentation of focus group discussions, see the transcripts in Appendix B or C). The results from the Questionnaire are presented next. Individual questions and groups of questions are examined as they relate to corresponding working hypotheses, (comprehensive Questionnaire results are found in Appendix A). Finally, for Working Hypotheses 4, an analysis of the Austin Fire Department's Organizational Chart is presented, (a copy of the Organizational Chart is found Appendix D).

As noted in Chapter Four, this research is qualitative. Most of the measurements for this study are based on respondent/participant perceptions and do not adapt well to statistical formula. Hence, the findings which flow from this research are represented largely through narration and description. Where applicable, simple statistics such as percent distribution or Mean and Mode will be employed; when possible, the results are presented relationally, with Line and Staff findings represented together. In order to facilitate interpretation and understanding, graphs, charts and tables are presented in the text and in Appendix A. Conclusions and recommendations drawn from the data and a discussion on the merits of the study are presented in Chapter Seven.

**Working Hypotheses 1:** *The structural categorizations of Line and Staff within the AFD constitute Groups.*

**Focus Group(s):**

The focus group evidence in support of Working Hypotheses 1 is compelling. The entire focus group discussions are replete with examples of individual and group claims to group identification and participation. Descriptive pronouns such as “They,” “Those people in Staff,” “Operations’ Folks,” “We” and “Them” provide clear evidence that AFD employees delineate group participation along the Line-Staff functional categorization boundary. Take, for example, the following two quotes:

*“The perception is when you ask somebody in the Operations group, “What do you think of Staff?” The first thing they think of is the department in Staff’s side that they haven’t gotten any help from, or they know someone is not doing a damn thing.”*

-- Line Focus Group

*“Staff does tremendously more than Operations*

-- Staff Focus Group

It is obvious from quotes such as these that there exists a clear distinction, both perceptual and structural, between the two functional groups of Line and Staff and that participants clearly identify with one or the other. As was noted in Chapter Three, Group affiliation is the central element in the constitution of “Group.” Therefore, the focus group evidence strongly supports Working Hypotheses 1 as members clearly affiliate with either the Line or Staff group.

**Questionnaire:**

As was discussed in Chapter Three, the literature is quite permissive regarding the definition and constitution of “groups.” Based on the literature alone, one can safely conclude that the functional divisions of Line and Staff within the AFD constitute groups and, de facto, support WH-1. However, the literature agrees that identification and recognition of group participation is important to group delineation. Question One on the survey asked simply: “Are you currently assigned to Line or Staff?” Of the 80

respondents, each selected an appropriate box indicating acknowledgment of Line or Staff identity.

**Working Hypotheses 2a:** *Line and Staff within the Austin Fire Department are in conflict due to goal inconsistencies between the two groups.*

**Focus Group(s):**

There is strong evidence within the focus group findings that both Line and Staff perceive the existence of goal inconsistencies between the two groups. Indeed, without facilitator prompting, the Line focus group initiated discussion on this issue. As one respondent notes:

*"...I think part of the problem is we haven't done a very good job of reaching an agreement about what our primary mission is. You said a moment ago that you thought it was prevention and public education. I think there's a strong belief that that's true in the fire service. I think there's also -- it may seem like a fine difference -- but I think a lot of the fire service believes that it is a mitigation and medical mission. And they get off on these rabbit trails thinking rather than that, that public education is the same thing as prevention, and it's not. It may be a point of prevention. I think though, as an organization, we ought to be open to an agreement on what our primary mission is and then stand back and figure out how are we going to accomplish it and what's the most effective way to do this." -- Line Focus Group*

In response to a facilitator question asking whether participants believed there is agreement on an organizational mission between Line and Staff, Line respondents unanimously claimed "No." As one respondent said, "Heck no. We don't have any consensus like that." However, there appears to be inconsistencies even within the Line focus group as to the primary mission of the department. The consensus within the Line focus group is that there exist so many "priorities," there isn't a coherent direction for members claim as the "one" central priority.

Staff respondents were equally convinced that there exists an inconsistency between Line and Staff perceptions of organizational priorities. In response to the question, "...do you think that they are working at cross purposes? That they believe the number one goal is different from what you might believe it to be?" All Staff respondents with the exception of one claimed "Yes." As one respondent notes,

*"...And emergency prevention with Operations as a back up, but those guys don't want to be considered as back up, because in their mind suppression is number one and everything else is....." [subordinate]*  
-- Staff Focus Group

Interestingly, it appears as if both Staff and Line participants perceive the goal incompatibility to exist as a perceptual difference concerning *importance of roles* rather than a specific concrete definition of "mission." In other words, Staff members perceive their goals as proactive, designed to prevent emergencies prior to their occurrence. As two separate Staff respondents note:

*"Their goals are different than our goals. My goal is to make sure that their vehicles are running. My goal is to perceive the support the Operations function (needs).....You know. But we perceive different."*  
-- Staff Focus Group

*"They're approaching it from the reaction standpoint, and that's all they see. Where we're looking at it from the proactive, prevention standpoint. And so, those two things are at odds."*  
-- Staff Focus Group

While Line members recognize the importance of this proactive role, they nevertheless perceive themselves as being the "tip of the spear." Contrast the above statements to the following Line dialogue:

*"The stations are out there doing prevention, but the stations are out there responding to emergencies too. It's the guys out there in Operations that are going out and doing everything that Staff guys write in mission statements and the policies. We're out there doing this for the department. That's why I say we're the point. The end mission will come right down to everybody out here." "...where's the tip of the spear?" "It's in Operations because -- and the reason I feel is because your positive public perception is built on a service delivered out in the field. That's where we get our good reputation. That's where people get this positive perception." "These people aren't thinking, "Thank God that Staff person is over there.""*  
-- Line Focus Group

These statements provide an interesting contrast to those made by Staff personnel and suggest a possible degree of conflict regarding the relative importance of Staff versus Line functions.

These findings suggest that the focus group evidence supports Working Hypotheses 2. It is clear from the transcripts that both Line and Staff members perceive the existence of a "gap" between the two functional groups concerning organizational priorities. While there are divergent opinions as to the best means to accomplish the

organizational mission, it is clear that members perceive the other group as having a different set of organizational priorities.<sup>1</sup>

#### Questionnaire:

To test this working hypotheses, the survey respondents were given an exercise where they were asked to rank-order a list of six organizational priorities promoted by the Austin Fire Department. In two provided columns, the respondents were asked to order the priorities according to two criteria: 1) how they *perceive* the organization's Executive Staff to order them; that is, what order to they perceive the priorities to be "in effect" by the AFD's administration, and 2) how *they believe* the priorities *should* be rank-ordered. Tables 6.1 and 6.2 present the results of this exercise.

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<sup>1</sup> This perceptual difference may exist not so much in notions of "mission," but rather in notions of how best to accomplish that mission. While it wasn't explicitly discussed in both groups, there is likely consensus between both Line and Staff members that the central mission of the fire service is to save lives and protect property. That issue wasn't being disputed. The perceptual difference appears to develop when discussing how best to accomplish that mission -- through Staff roles or Line roles. Judging from the focus group transcripts, it really appears to be a contest of who has the more important role. Like sibling brothers fighting over the front seat of the car, the Line and Staff perception of priority borders on petty. However, while such behavior may appear sophomoric, it may be the result of a cultural norm which has placed, for years, combat and mitigation at the center of a fire department's existence.

**Table 6.1**  
**Line** Perception of Goal Compatibility

Respondents Number One Selection	Public Education	Pre-hospital Emergency Care	Fire Mitigation & Emergency Response	Employee Development	Fire Fighter Safety and Fitness	Fire Prevention & Pre-Incident Intervention
<b>Perceive</b> as Number One Goal	6.06%	<b>54.54%</b>	9.09%	3.03%	6.06%	6.06%
<b>Believe</b> Should be Number One Goal	6.06%	18.18%	<b>27.27%</b>	0%	<b>36.36%</b>	9.09%

n=33

Does not include "Other" category responses

**Table 6.2**  
**Staff** Perception of Goal Compatibility

Respondents Number One Selection	Public Education	Pre-hospital Emergency Care	Fire Mitigation & Emergency Response	Employee Development	Fire Fighter Safety and Fitness	Fire Prevention & Pre-Incident Intervention
<b>Perceive</b> as Number One Goal	4.25%	<b>48.94%</b>	25.53%	0%	8.5%	6.4%
<b>Believe</b> Should be Number One Goal	2.12%	14.9%	<b>34.04%</b>	2.12%	<b>42.6%</b>	2.12%

n=47

Does not include "Other" category responses

As indicated by these results, there is a strong *similarity* between Line and Staff perceptions on organizational goals, both the perceived goals of the organization *and* the preferred ranking of those organizational goals. Interestingly, both Line and Staff respondents selected Pre-hospital Emergency Care as the number one "in effect" organizational priority, with Line respondents at 55% and Staff respondents measuring just under 50%. Furthermore, and perhaps more revealing, *both* Line and Staff selected Fire

Fighter Safety and Fitness as their *number one* organizational goal, with 36% of Line and 43% of Staff respondents making this claim.

These results are paradoxical to the focus group results and suggest that there is **not** a goal inconsistency between Line and Staff. Indeed, the data are strikingly similar. Viewed collectively, however, the contradictory data between focus group and questionnaire data provide important insight into the Line-Staff relationship as it reveals a perceptual dichotomy between the two groups, *in spite of evidence which suggest a closely aligned goal hierarchy between the two groups*. This interesting finding may suggest that conflictual group processes are at work.

**Working Hypotheses 2b:** *Line and Staff within the Austin Fire Department are in conflict due to competition over resources.*

**Focus Group(s):**

As was noted in the Methods chapter, “Resources,” for the purpose of this study, are operationalized as “Information.” Focus Group respondents were asked whether they felt as if they were, as a group, “in the loop” within the Austin Fire Department. One of the four defining criteria given for “in the loop” was *access to information*. While this question was designed specifically to test power levels between the two groups, inferential reasoning is employed to test Working Hypotheses 2b.

Overwhelmingly, Line respondents claim to be *out* of the loop as it pertains to *access to information*. Numerous respondents noted that their “access” to information is simply what is transmitted down to them through the chain of command and that it is frequently “behind the power curve.” As two Line respondents have noted,

*“I tend to hear about things after decisions have been made.”*

-- Line Focus Group

*“You think your getting a lot of information? You kind of know what’s going on? Six months later you feel like, “Man, I don’t have any idea what’s going on in this department.”*

-- Line Focus Group

Line participants agree that their access to information is limited and that its limitation may be due to the military structure of the organization coupled to the remote outpost configuration of station assignment. Furthermore, they note that an attempt to gain information on department decisions might present a breach of command. Subsequently, there is a natural inhibition for Line personnel to attempt to gain information -- members don't want to risk breaking the chain of command. Thus, they recognize that structural impediments to information exist within the Line functional group.

While Line participants agree that there may be a "loop" which provides access to information, even if they were willing to break the chain of command, they note that they are reluctant to use it as they oftentimes don't know who to call or what section to contact. One respondent provides an interesting description of this,

*"As far as access to information, go to all the firefighters, drivers, lieutenants, captains in your district and ask them, "Hey, where is so-in-so in Staff right now?" They won't be able to tell you whether they're at headquarters or at Med Ops, or whether it's Op's Annex, Ops Support. It's like "Where is so-in-so's office?" I have no idea? These phone lists. Is this a current phone list?" ".....So where am I? I'm frustrated because there ain't no loop."* -- Line Focus Group

Staff respondents overwhelmingly concede that they are much more in the loop than Line personnel. One respondent notes that the multiple work-related links between Staff offices and the need to coordinate and communicate on programs and projects naturally keep Staff members in the information loop. As he notes:

*"Within Staff there's a lot more communications, especially through the assistant chiefs. Everything is communicated probably on a weekly basis. Whereas, I think when you get out in Operations, if it doesn't directly affect your unit you may not hear about it right away. It may be two weeks later when it's filtered down to your unit that you're going to a central site delivery for a training purpose or a Med Ops purpose or you're going to a school. We've known about it for several weeks."* -- Staff Focus Group

Unanimously, Staff participants agree that access to information and participation in decisions is increased as a function of their Staff assignment. Furthermore, Staff participants agree with Line participants in the notion that Line personnel could gain access to information if they wanted to. Similar to Line perceptions, however, Staff participants agree that a Line member *would not know who to contact to gain that information*. The following Staff dialogue reveals this agreement.



*"And I think maybe they don't know which way to go to get the information." "Or which way to go to be in the loop." "They're not exposed." "And here again because -- right, because they don't know which -- when they pick up that phone which person to call -- to get the information." -- Staff Focus Group*

When the researcher suggested that a Line attempt to access information by calling an assistant chief might constitute a breach of command, Staff participants agreed.

Remarkably, when Staff participants were asked if their attempts to access information through an assistant chief would constitute a breach of command, they claimed it would not. Why the special treatment?

*"I think it's because on a day-to-day basis you work with your assistant chief or your chief."*  
-- Staff Focus Group.

The transcripts from the Line and Staff focus groups provide strong support that Staff members possess greater access to information than Line members. Both groups agree that an information loop exists within the AFD and that Staff members, by virtue of their assignment, maintain greater participation within that loop. Therefore, it can be concluded from these findings that Line and Staff are in competition for information and that access to that information is asymmetrical due to functional assignment, thus supporting Working Hypotheses 2.

#### Questionnaire:

Survey questions 5, 6 and 7 were designed to measure this working hypotheses. Utilizing the Operationalization indicators of "Information as Resource" and "Budget Authority as Resource," respondents were asked whether they were kept informed on important decisions that affect them, whether they could gain access to information on important decisions that affect them, or whether they had any budget authority. Table 6.3 displays the Mode responses for these questions. For a detailed presentation of the results to these questions including Mean values, see Appendix A.

**Table 6.3**  
Working Hypotheses 2b  
Resource Competition

Question	Staff Mode	Line Mode
Question 5: <i>Information as Resource</i>	"Frequently" 45%	"Frequently" 42%
Question 6: <i>Information as Resource</i>	"Frequently" 45%	"Frequently" 42%
Question 7: <i>Budget Authority as Resource</i>	"Never" 49%	"Never" 73%

N=80

The questionnaire data for Working Hypotheses 2b are mixed. Responses to questions five and six which measure perceptions on *access to information* appear to be consistent between the two functional groups, suggesting that they share a relatively equal perception concerning their access to information on decisions that affect them. Both questions five and six share positive mean scores, .60 and .45 for Line, and .40 and .46 for Staff respectively. The Mode responses for both Line and Staff in response to these questions are "Frequently," with both groups falling within the mid-forty percentages for both questions. These data suggest parallel perceptions on access to information between the two groups.

Question seven, which explores perceptions on budget authority, is perhaps more telling. Fully 73% percent of Line respondents claim to "Never" retain budget authority, yielding a mean score of -1.72. Furthermore, *zero* percent of Line respondents scored in the positive value for this question, while 22% of Staff respondents claim to have *some* budget authority. While neither group maintains an overall positive mean score for the question on "budget authority," the difference in values between the groups may provide some interesting insight. It is obvious from these data that Staff members, as a group, control a greater portion of the budget than Line, suggesting a possible asymmetric distribution of resource control.

Overall, then, it can be concluded that the questionnaire data for Working Hypotheses 2b provide only partial support that Line and Staff are in conflict due to competition over resources.

**Working Hypotheses 3a:** *Line and Staff within the Austin Fire Department are in conflict due to strong within-group ties.*

**Working Hypotheses 3b:** *Line and Staff within the Austin Fire Department are in conflict due to weak between-group ties.*

**Focus Group(s):**

While the indicators of “Contact” and “Interaction” are not directly probed by focus group questions, their existence can be inferred from related focus group discussion. In particular, the discussions on whether Line or Staff perceive themselves as “in the loop” reveals high levels of within-group contact and interaction and low levels of between group contact and interaction. This is especially noteworthy in the Staff focus group. In explaining why Staff members are “in the loop,” several participants reveal indicators of high within-group contact and interaction:

*“Because we have to contact. Even though we don't do it real well. We still have to coordinate and communicate. Bob's got something I need, or I've got to do a project that involves using some of Bob's equipment. Those kinds of things.” -- Staff Focus Group*

*“Within Staff there's a lot more communications, especially through the assistant chiefs. Everything is communicated probably on a weekly basis. Whereas, I think when you get out in Operations, if it doesn't directly affect your unit you may not hear about it right away. It may be two weeks later when it's filtered down to your unit that you're going to a central site delivery for a training purpose or a Med Ops purpose or you're going to a school. We've known about it for several weeks.” -- Staff Focus Group*

Thus, according to staff perceptions, within-group contact and interaction are a necessary function of their organizational positioning. Staff participants claim to work on broader organizational issues that move well beyond “only having to worry about their station” and, as a result, interact with other Staff sections, divisions and departments in the pursuit of their tasks.

Line focus group members appear to agree. While there isn't a great deal of discussion that supports strong within-group interaction from the Line focus group, there are some supporting statements that reveal low between-group contact and interaction.

*"I feel at times I have been in the loop, but I would say on a whole, no. Of course I don't feel like I'm in the loop. And part of that is the isolation of fire stations versus where Staff people work. It's very possible for firefighters, once they are in, to go work at their fire station and have almost no interaction with Staff or anybody in any higher position."* -- Line Focus Group

Furthermore, as was mentioned in the above section on Working Hypotheses 2b, there is a great deal of evidence from both the Staff and Line focus groups that Line members do not know who to contact in search of information, which suggests a low level of between-group contact and interaction. This conclusion is an inference, but nevertheless a logical one. If contact and interaction were high between the groups, it seems logical that Line members would know who to contact for organizational-based information.

Thus, the focus group results tend to support Working Hypotheses 3a and 3b as it is apparent that both Line and Staff members perceive interaction between the two functional groups to be low. Further, there is strong support that Staff members perceive their level of within-group interaction to be high.

#### Questionnaire:

Since the concepts of *within-group ties* and *between-group ties* are necessarily symbiotic, survey questions 8-14b are designed to measure them together. These concepts were measured by employing the operationalization indicators of "Frequency of Interaction," "Frequency of Contact," "Friendship as a Quality of Interaction" and "Reciprocity." Table 6.4 reviews the Mode responses for the questions designed to test WH's 3a and 3b. For a detailed presentation of the results to these questions including Mean values, see Appendix A.

**Table 6.4**  
Working Hypotheses 3a & 3b  
**Group Ties**

<b>Question</b>	<b>Staff Mode</b>	<b>Line Mode</b>
Question 8: <i>Staff Interaction</i>	"Always" 40%	"Rarely" 33%
Question 9: <i>Line Interaction</i>	"Sometimes" 45%	"Always" 52%
Question 10: <i>Staff Contact</i>	"Always" 70%	"Rarely" 49%
Question 11: <i>Line Contact</i>	"Frequently" 53%	"Always" 79%
Question 12: <i>Staff Quality of Interaction</i>	"Frequently" 53%	"Frequently" 39%
Question 13: <i>Line Quality of Interaction</i>	"Frequently" 45%	"Frequently" 45%
Question 14a: <i>Staff Favors</i>	"Frequently" 26%	"Rarely" 45%
Question 14b: <i>Line Favors</i>	"Sometimes" 36%	"Sometimes" 42%

N=80

The data from questions 8 and 9 consider *interaction* within and between the functional groups of Line and Staff. The data strongly suggests that the level of *within-group* interaction is *high* for both Line and Staff. Fully 79% of Staff respondents claim to interact with within-group members on a "Frequently" or "Always" basis; likewise, 90% of Line respondents claim to interact "Frequently" or "Always" with within-group members. The Mean score for question 8 regarding *Staff interaction* is 1.06 for Staff and -.24 for Line. Contrast these data to the Mean score for question 9 regarding *Line interaction*, which is 1.39 for Line and .23 for Staff. These data suggest that levels of interaction *between* the two functional groups are *low*, while levels of interaction *within* the two functional groups are *high*. The data does suggest that Staff personnel have some interaction with Line personnel as 45% of the Staff respondents claim to interact with Line personnel on a *Sometimes* basis. Only 30% of Line respondents claim to interact with Staff personnel *Sometimes*.

Questions 10 and 11 are similar to 8 and 9, although they propose to measure levels of *contact* within and between the two functional groups of Line and Staff. Again, there

is strong support that within-group contact for both groups is *high* while between-group contact is *low*. Indeed, the within-group contact Mean score for Line is 1.69, while the Staff Mean score for Staff within-group contact is 1.62 -- suggesting a very high level of within-group contact for both functional groups. In fact, the Staff Mode response for the question regarding *Staff contact* is "Always," with 70% claiming this level of contact. Similarly, the Line Mode for *Line contact* is also "Always," with just under 80% making this claim. The between-group data regarding contact is similar to the data on interaction, with a Line Mean of -.27 on the question which considers Staff contact and a Staff Mean of .51 regarding Line contact.

As was discussed in Chapter Three, strong within-group ties and weak between-group ties are considered central elements in the dynamic process that engenders conflict between groups. These incipient dynamics cause group boundaries to become less permeable, which may in turn lead to negative affect between groups; the combination of these elements begin the multi-faceted phenomenological process of group dysfunction. Therefore, these results provide important insight into the Line-Staff relationship and offer evidential support for Working Hypotheses 3a and 3b.

The data from questions 12 and 13 are interesting. In spite of the high levels of within-group contact and the low levels of between-group contact supported by the above data, both groups perceive interaction with the other group as being friendly and cooperative, with a mutual understanding of common goals. Indeed, Means for quality of interaction with *Staff* are 1.03 from Line personnel and 1.21 from Staff; likewise, Means for quality of interaction with *Line* are 1.36 from Line and .79 from Staff. Interestingly, the Mode response for both questions 12 and 13 for **both** groups is "Frequently," suggesting that the majority of respondents consider quality of interaction both *between* and *within* the two groups to be positive.

Questions 14(a) and (b) measure *reciprocity* as an indicator of within-group cohesiveness. Interestingly, neither group indicates a strong positive response to these

questions. Means for these questions are just negative of neutral, suggesting that both Line and Staff perceive reciprocal interaction (favors) equally, whether it be within or between the two groups. Approximately 26% of Staff respondents claim to do favors for within-group members "Frequently," while 18% of Line respondents claim to do within-group members favors "Frequently." Mode responses for Staff on both questions regarding within-group and between-group favors fall in the "Sometimes" response category. Similarly, the majority of Line respondents claim to "Rarely" do favors for Staff members (46%) while the majority claim to do within-group members favors "Sometimes," (42%). These data do not make any compelling statements for either group.

Overall, it can be concluded that the data from questions 8-14(b) provide partial support for Working Hypotheses 3a and 3b. Perhaps most importantly, the data *does suggest* that both groups maintain strong within-group ties and weak between-group ties as measured by levels of *contact* and *interaction*. As discussed above, these elements are central to the phenomenological process of group dysfunction and are the primary indicators being measured by this instrument. Working Hypotheses 3a and 3b are supported by the evidence from these two questions.

The results from the questions which measure quality of interaction between the two groups might suggest that the phenomenological process of group dysfunction discussed above is not yet pervasive. The data reveal a positive perception from both groups on quality of interaction, both within and between groups. This evidence may suggest a lack of support for working hypotheses 2a and 2b, although the direct inquiry of the working hypotheses are supported.

Similarly, the results from the questions that measure reciprocity as a quality of interaction between groups offer minimal insight into the Line-Staff relationship. It is apparent from the data that Line personnel do more favors for within-group members; similarly, Staff personnel do more favors for within-group members. However, there is

no compelling evidence in support or otherwise for working Hypotheses 3a or 3b drawn from the data on the questions which measure reciprocity.

**Working Hypotheses 3c:** *Conflict between Line and Staff within the AFD is perpetuated by self-reinforcing behaviors.*

**Focus Group(s):**

Working Hypotheses 3c is designed to reveal whether group processes, particularly group processes of conflict, are operative between the functional categorizations of Line and Staff. In Chapter Three, it was discussed that groups possessing strong within-group ties and weak between-group ties have tendencies to interpret organizational events differently. Specifically, groups possessing strong internal cohesiveness tend to interpret the *same* organizational event *differently*.<sup>2</sup> Opposing interpretations of organizational events suggests a strongly cohesive group, which leads to other group manifestations of conflict. Therefore, this working hypotheses was operationalized within the focus group research by asking respondents how they perceive a recent change within the AFD's hiring process.<sup>3</sup>

The focus group data on interpretations of this organizational event are strikingly *similar*. Both groups claim to have minimal knowledge about how the process even works and those members within the groups that are familiar with the process claim that it is an improvement. Note the following statements:

*"I like the aspect of the BPAD. I like the aspect of the board and review by peers, by firefighters, both new firefighters and old firefighters. I like everything. The weighted part is what I'm not sure about. And I guess only time will tell. I'm not ready to make a judgment on it. I see a lot of weight on it and I think a lot of people's fears are based on emotions."* -- Line Focus Group

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<sup>2</sup> See Rentsch, Joan, 1990, "Climate and Culture: Interaction and Qualitative Differences in Organizational Meanings," *Journal of Applied Psychology*.

<sup>3</sup> This topic was selected due to its controversial nature. In 1996, the AFD Executive Staff introduced a hiring process that was remarkably different from the standard civil service process that had been in place. Many AFD employees viewed the new process as a threat to their civil service status and perceived it as an attempt to introduce subjective elements into the selection process. The new process was hotly debated within fire houses and emotions still run high.



*"I think the hiring process has always been evolutionary, and will always tend to be. It's always changing looking for the right combination of things to pick the right people for the job." -- Staff Focus Group*

As these quotes suggest, group members do not present strong emotions either way -- for or against the process. In fact, in both groups, the consensus is that the jury is still out. Group participants from both Line and Staff agree that time will tell whether the new process selects good candidates for the job, or not. Thus, based on the operationalization indicator of, "interpretation of organizational events," focus group results reject Working Hypotheses 3c. It is clear from the focus group results that both groups perceive this event similarly.

However, there are numerous other manifestations of self-reinforcing group behaviors discussed in the literature which suggest conflict. Group tendencies to "stereotype" out-group members, "ethnocentrism" -- or the tendency to build positive affect for in-group members and negative affect for out-groups -- and "mobilization of bias" are all discussed as self-reinforcing behaviors common to groups in conflict. While these indicators were not specifically designed into the focus group format, they nevertheless reveal themselves through focus group interaction.

Indeed, there is a strong tendency within both groups toward ethnocentrism. In the Staff focus group, this tendency is manifest by examining interpretations of job requirements. Specifically, Staff participants claim to have much more work and responsibilities on a daily basis than Line personnel. This perceived work-load asymmetry appears to lead to resentment, which in turn manifests itself in a tendency to stereotype the out-group while building up the in-group as having an unrealistically more important role. Note the progression of the following Staff dialogue.

*"Staff does tremendously more than Operations." "That's another thing that we, like you say, that we have real jobs." "Right" {Laughter} "Take a Staff job, the 8-hour period. Take out your breaks. Take out your lunch, how many of those hours....." "You get breaks?" {Laughter} "...How many of those minutes are filled with productive work time? And [do] the same thing in Operations. Take the 24 hours of Operations....." "Take eight of it." "....Take that time and add up how much time was really spent on runs; how much time was spent returning to an alarm, going to alarms; how much time was spent cleaning the station? How much time was spent on other activities that they did that day? And then, compare the two, and I think then you'll see where there's somewhat of a attitude I guess, that they do have a lot*

*of time." "The other thing that I think, and the longer you stay in Staff, the more you probably experience it, when you go on vacation or you're sick or it's your day off, your work is still there." "And it piles up." "And it piles up. When your in Operations, when 12 o'clock rolls around, if your on a call..." "Your relieved on the spot." -- Staff Focus Group, emphasis added.*

The above dialogue reveals group tendencies toward ethnocentrism, to view in-group actions positively while concurrently developing negative perceptions of out-group activities. When asked if these "attitudes" about Line personnel were ever discussed by "bad-mouthing" the other guys (stereotyping), numerous Staff participants agreed that they were. Several Staff participants confessed that they tend to focus on a negative event with Line personnel and, subsequently, allow that interpretation to bias their entire perception of Line members (mobilization of bias). As two Staff participants note:

*"Also, we have human nature. We have the tendency to focus on the negative. So, if you were talking to a whole group of people in Operations, and you get a negative comment from one that says, 'That's not our job. We shouldn't be doing this.' And the others who don't necessarily feel that way, they don't say anything. Well, we zoom in and we focus on that negative comment. And then, so, we carry that with us." -- Staff Focus Group*

*"We'd sit around and say, 'Oh they don't do anything but watch TV.' And everybody will pick up and play on that for a while. The only difference is that we don't do it 24-hours at a time because you have to go back to work." -- Staff Focus Group*

Line participants display similar tendencies toward mobilization of bias and ethnocentrism. Interestingly, Line participants recognize that Staff members are required to do work that is different from traditional station activities, and there even appears to be an element of respect for what Staff members are required to do. However, Line personnel overwhelmingly categorize Staff members as working in an undesirable assignment, as "whiners" who don't want to be assigned to Staff and are simply biding their time until they can get out. Like a prison sentence, Line perceptions are that Staff personnel don't want to be where they are. Note the following dialogue:

*"...It's like a 180 degree turn from what they're used to doing. And for most people now assigned to Staff, these are the Operations people who are sitting out there bitching about Staff, steadily finding themselves in Staff having to learn a job they really don't want." -- Line Focus Group*

*"Y' know, if you went to anybody in the general public and said, 'I'm going to pay you \$30,000 to \$40,000 to drive all over the city to make sure that they are fire safe, i.e.: doing building inspections, they would think it would be the greatest job in the world. You drag some driver who is making a promotion*

*list down in prevention, and he's going to go kicking and screaming, just "Oh Wa, Wa, Wa!" It's all a perception."*

-- Line Focus Group

Line participants also reveal the tendency to cast all Staff personnel into the same basket, no matter what their assignment or role. When asked if Line personnel tend to associate Staff, as a group, with executive decisions from the Command Staff, unanimously they agreed that they do. This tendency suggests a level of ethnocentricity which may lead to general stereotyping of the out-group. Furthermore, if undesirable decisions or edicts are transmitted from the Command Staff, Operations personnel may view all Staff members as the "common threat" group. (Janus, 1982)

Line participants, like Staff, agree that they maintain a tendency to focus on the negative and to allow that negative experience to amplify. As one Line officer notes:

*"The perception is when you ask somebody in the Operations group, "What do you think of Staff?" The first thing they think of is the department in Staff's side that they haven't gotten any help from, or they know someone is not doing a damn thing."*

-- Line Focus Group

Similar to Staff, it appears as if Line members allow negative experiences to amplify, thus creating a negative perception of the out-group in general.

Finally, it is apparent from Line discussions on their role within the fire department that they view emergency operations as the "point" function of the fire service. While there was a dissenter in group, the majority of the Line participants revealed a bias toward emergency activities, suggesting the existence of ethnocentrism. Consider the following quotes:

*"The thing of it is, you can do all the smoke detector programs, all the code compliance, all the prevention education, and all that stuff. But when those condos are burning in the middle of UT...."*

-- Line Focus Group

*"The stations are out there doing prevention, but the stations are out there responding to emergencies too. It's the guys out there in Operations that are going out and doing everything that Staff guys write in mission statements and the policies. We're out there doing this for the department. That's why I say we're the point. The end mission will come right down to everybody out here."*

-- Line Focus Group

*"...The goal to deliver with, like they've been hammering us with TQM, is the service we deliver to the citizens and the taxpayers out there in Austin is -- we're the ones who do the face-to-face with them. I mean, when they think fire department, they're looking at you and that emergency vehicle.....They're not looking at the guy sitting out there behind the desk. They're looking at us."*

-- Line Focus Group

Similar to Staff, these Line statements reveal the tendency to view in-group activities in a positive light, while concurrently down-playing the role of the out-group -- both manifestations of group conflict.

While the original operational indicator intended to test group phenomena for this working hypotheses is rejected by the results (*interpretation of organizational events*), subsequent group dynamics reveal **strong** tendencies toward self-reinforcing group behaviors. The indicators of “ethnocentrism,” “mobilization of bias,” and group tendencies to “stereotype” out-group members are prevalent in focus group discussions. Therefore, based on these three indicators, it can be concluded that Working Hypotheses 3c has been supported by the evidence.

#### Questionnaire:

Survey questions 15 and 16 are designed to test group tendencies to stereotype out-group members. Table 6.5 presents the Mode responses to these questions. For comprehensive questionnaire results including Mean values, see Appendix A.

**Table 6.5**  
Working Hypotheses 3c  
Reinforcing Behaviors

Question	Staff Mode	Line Mode
Question 15: <i>Stereotype of Line</i>	“Sometimes” 38%	“Rarely” 45%
Question 16: <i>Stereotype of Staff</i>	“Rarely” 47%	“Rarely” 40%

N=80

The responses to questions 15 and 16 provide some interesting insight into group dynamics between Line and Staff within the AFD. Fully 28% of Staff personnel cite that they *Frequently* feel that Line personnel “don’t have a clue.” Likewise, 28% of Line respondents cite that they *Frequently* think that Staff personnel “..don’t have a clue..” Almost a **third** of the respondents for each functional group maintain these perceptions of out-group members. These findings are important as they reveal the tendency for group members to stereotype and assign negative affect with out-group members, both of which

are phenomenological manifestations of group conflict. Even though the Mean and Mode scores suggest an overall neutral response to these questions, the percent distributions still suggest that group processes are at work. Therefore, questions 15 and 16 provide some support for Working Hypothesis 3c.<sup>4</sup>

**Working Hypotheses 4:** *Line and Staff within the Austin Fire Department are in conflict due to structural power asymmetries between the two groups.*

**Focus Group(s):**

In Focus Group discussions, Working Hypotheses 4 is tested by introducing a concept which this researcher refers to as “In the Loop.” In the loop, for the purposes of this research, is defined by the following: 1) access to information, 2) involvement in programs, projects and decisions which affect the direction of the organization, 3) multiple work-related links, and 4) access to people in positions of power, authority and influence. This four-point definition is designed to measure multiple operationalization indicators; specifically, it intends to measure *workflow links*, *network centrality*, *access to information*, and *involvement*. All of these indicators represent degrees of organizational power. These indicators are discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.

Overwhelmingly, focus group participants, both Line and Staff, agree that Staff members are, by virtue of their functional assignment, in the “loop” to a much greater extent than Line personnel. When initially presented with the question, “Who’s more in the loop, Line or Staff,” unanimously, Staff respondents quickly responded that they were.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, Staff respondents even go so far as to claim that the Staff functional category *is* the loop within the AFD.

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<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that group-oriented, self-reinforcing behaviors are difficult phenomena to operationalize into quantitative instruments. As was noted in Chapter Three in the section on Group Dynamics, the self-reinforcing nature of group behaviors is both complex and multidimensional. Thus, it is difficult to create, or recreate, any sense of group behavior in a written questionnaire instrument. Therefore, the validity of the evidence drawn from questions 15 and 16 should be held suspect until they are supported by complimentary data drawn from other methodologies.

*"...Also, I think Staff could be considered like maybe the hub. Not necessarily the hub of the department, but in this loop it's kind of the hub. It's just a concentric circle. When Med Ops is going to do something, everybody is kind of informed...Okay, we were going to have this but Med Ops needs to have the central site delivery by a certain date. So, we've got to stick training in after that. Pub Ed's got a big event in October or they've got a big event in June. Within Staff there's a lot more communications..."*

-- Staff Focus Group, emphasis added.

Staff respondents agree that being assigned to the Staff functional group provides greater access to multiple sections within the department (network centrality and workflow links), and that this access keeps them informed on activities that are going on within the department (access to information). Thus, the Staff perspective suggests that Staff members perceive themselves as being *fundamental participants* in the loop and that, perhaps, *they may even constitute the loop itself*.

Contrasted to Line responses, it becomes clear that there is a department-wide perception that Staff participants are more in the loop than Line. While Line respondents were a bit more philosophical in their interpretation of the concept of "loop," it is apparent from the Line transcripts that the group perceives themselves as being excluded from the loop -- however defined. Interestingly, as discussed in the narrative under Working Hypotheses 2b, Line respondents also perceive the existence of structural impediments to membership in the "loop." By virtue of their assignment in the Line group, which necessarily, but inexplicably, maintains a more rigid application of the chain of command, Line personnel feel as if they can't join the "loop" even if they wanted to.

The focus group evidence from both the Line and Staff discussions provide strong support for Working Hypotheses 4. Thus, it can be concluded that, 1) there is a perception of power imbalance between Line and Staff, and 2) structural power asymmetries within the Austin Fire Department exist between the functional categories of Line and Staff. As was discussed in Chapter Three, perceptions of inequality in organizational power may lead to conflict.

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<sup>5</sup> There is a very interesting, but too lengthy for replication, dialogue in the Staff transcript that addresses this issue. See appendix B.

### Questionnaire:

Survey questions 2-4 and 17-19 are designed to test respondent perceptions on *power*. The indicators of “Workflow Links,” “Meetings” and “Connection Power” are employed to measure this working hypotheses. Table 6.6 presents the Mode responses for these questions. For a detailed presentation of the results to these questions including Mean values, see Appendix A.<sup>6</sup>

**Table 6.6**  
Working Hypotheses 4  
Power Asymmetry

<b>Question</b>	<b>Staff Mode</b>	<b>Line Mode</b>
Question 17: <i>Workflow Linkages</i>	“Sometimes” 45%	“Sometimes” 52%
Question 18: <i>Meetings as Power</i>	“Frequently” 51%	“Sometimes” 36%
Question 19: <i>Connection Power</i>	“Sometimes” 34%	“Sometimes” 58%

N=80

In response to question 17, concerning multiple *work-related links*, just over half, or 52% of Line respondents claim to interact with other organizational sections on a “Sometimes” basis, while 19% claim to do so “Frequently.” Interestingly, 40% of Staff respondents claim to interact with other sections and divisions “Frequently” and 45% claim to do so “Sometimes.” These data suggest that Staff personnel may have greater work-flow links than Line, revealing a possible power imbalance between the two. However, it should be noted that the Mode response for each group is “Sometimes,” suggesting that the majority of each group’s members perceive their level of work-related links equally. Thus, only partial support for Working Hypotheses 4 may be claimed as it relates to the indicator of work-flow links.

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<sup>6</sup> Questions 2-4 are not supported directly through the literature. These questions measure perceptions on levels of “involvement.” These questions were designed to explore an area of interest to the researcher -- perhaps an area of further study. However, since they are not supported by the literature (i.e.: their influence on group dynamics was not investigated), they will not be discussed in this chapter, nor will the results be included in the conclusions drawn from this study.

Question 18 measures respondent perceptions on organizational *meetings*; specifically, how often they perceive themselves as attending meetings. Fifty-one percent of the Staff respondents claim to attend meetings on a “Frequently” basis, while only 24% of Line respondents make the same claim. An equal 36% of both respondent groups claim to attend meetings “Sometimes.” Moreover, only 10% of Staff respondents claim either “Rarely” or “Never” in response to the question concerning meeting attendance, while 30% of Line respondents make the same claim. Chapter Three examined the connection between meetings and organizational power and promoted the notion that the level of meetings attended by an employee correspond to levels of power within the organization. These data provide some support for Working Hypotheses 4 as they reveal that Staff members participate in a greater number of meetings than Line.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, question 19 measures respondent perceptions on their level of “connection power” within the organization. Interestingly, both Line and Staff perceive their level of connection power to be low, with a Mean score of -.15 for Staff and -.12 for Line. Of particular interest is the data from the Line respondents, 58% of whom claim to possess Moderate “connection power” and 27% who claim a Healthy level of “connection power.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> These data may be suspect. From personal experience within the organization of study, this researcher finds it *very* difficult to believe that 24% of Line respondents claim *Frequently* and 36% Line respondents claim *Sometimes* to this question. In reflecting on these data, the researcher presumes that different people interpret the concept of “meeting” differently. Sitting around the fire house kitchen table discussing “what we plan to do today” is not what this researcher intended as a qualified meeting, but it is possible that respondents interpreted the concept of “meeting” to include such informal “gatherings.” This researcher intended “meeting” to mean: any *formal* gathering of organizational employees to discuss, plan or organize activities in the pursuit of the organizational mission. The potentially broad interpretation of “meeting” is a flaw in the logic flow and organization of the survey instrument and represents a lack of rigor on the part of the researcher.

<sup>8</sup> Again, similar to notions of “meetings”, it is possible that there are wildly divergent conceptions of “connection power.” The intent of this question is to measure perceptions of power as they relate to personal and professional access to people in legitimate positions of authority and power. A Line firefighter who has an occasional beer with his Lieutenant after a tour of duty may perceive this to be a dimension of “connection power.” Likewise, a Lieutenant who works with a Captain and shares a good rapport may perceive himself as in a position of “connection power.” These notions of power do not square with the researcher’s notion of power, nor the literature’s. This issue, as before, represents a lack of rigor in the instrument. However, the intent of this whole research is to measure *perceptions* of Line and Staff members within the AFD. If Line members *perceive* themselves to be in a position of power, whether it squares with the researcher’s intent or not is irrelevant. *Their perception is their reality*; therefore, this



Contrast these findings to the Staff responses: 34% Moderate and 25% Healthy. Based on these data, one must conclude that power balances between the two groups in the area of “connection power” is relatively equal, thus providing little support for Working Hypotheses 4.

Overall, the questionnaire data intended to test Working Hypotheses 4 provide minimal support for the working hypotheses. While it is clear that Staff members participate in a greater number of meetings than Line, the statistical difference is not compelling. Further, both groups perceive their levels of “centrality” and “connection power” equally, suggesting a balanced distribution of power for these indicators.

#### Document Analysis -- Organizational Chart:

Only one document is reviewed in this research: the AFD’s formal Organizational Chart, (see Appendix D). The department’s Organizational Chart is selected for analysis as it reveals the department’s structural categorization scheme for both the Line and Staff functional groups. The AFD’s org-chart is examined with the intent to test only Working Hypotheses 4.

The AFD’s organizational chart provides an interesting example of what may be considered an Executive priority between the two categories of Line and Staff. Interestingly, the entire Staff functional category, with specific divisions, sections, bureaus, ranks, positions - and even names - are represented on the chart. Names of Administrative Assistants, Captains, Lieutenants, Systems analysts -- even the Investigation Section’s *fire dog* have prominent places in the organizational chart. They are all assigned to Staff. Every Battalion Chief assigned to the Staff Division is noted by name on the chart -- all nine of them. Note, in contrast, the section of the chart devoted to the Line Division of the Department.<sup>9</sup> The largest division in the department is relegated to a nameless, very small block in the chart. Fully 90% of the department’s personnel

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question is a valid measurement of Line perceptions regarding “connection power” *as it was defined for the survey.*

including 18 Battalion Chiefs, dozens of Captains and Lieutenants and hundreds of firefighters are represented by the small box.

Arguably, the entire Line Division within the department might pose a rather unwieldy inclusion into the chart. However, the fact that the Line group is not represented in an equal degree as the Staff group may reveal an executive bias toward one division over the other. Indeed, perhaps it's not so important to note that the Line Division is not equally represented as it is to note that somewhere in the evolution of the department's structure, somebody felt it necessary to assign greater value to Staff functions over Line functions in the department's formal organizational chart. This notion is especially poignant in light of one focus group participant's comment:

*"I participated in several different jobs in Staff. I sat in meetings with the then fire chief and other people, who out of their own mouth looked at us and told those of us who were on Staff how wonderful we are, and how necessary we are, how we're the ones that run this fire department....And so, I think that it's very much of the reflection of the attitude of the leaders here that creates -- that promotes the gulf that exists oftentimes."*  
-- Line Focus Group

Such leadership attitudes, it has already been noted, may categorically be assigned to the entire Staff Division by Line members -- it is part of the mobilization of bias phenomenon discussed under the section on WH-3c.

The organizational chart may also indirectly support an imbalance in workflow links and network centrality. While the chart does not graphically represent work-flows or communication networks, it is clear that the Staff functions are centrally linked to each other by common lines. Staff appears to possess greater ties to the hierarchy of the organization. It may also be inferred that the chart represents the "hub," as one focus group participant christened it, of the department's power-center. These are inferences, but natural ones given the design of the chart. Indeed, one can't help but to recognize that the entire Line section is cast aside and not interconnected to the overall chart by any line --

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<sup>9</sup> Can't find it?? You may need to put on your glasses... Look to the middle-right section of the chart for a box that contains a five-rank flow beginning with Division Chief and ending with Firefighter.

dotted or otherwise.<sup>10</sup> While this design of the chart may be the most efficient method to represent the department's structure, it still may reveal potential biases toward the Staff section.

Inferential reasoning and logical analysis may suggest that the Organizational Chart, which graphically displays the AFD's structuration scheme for Line and Staff, represents a bias toward the Staff function. It may also be concluded that this chart suggest a power imbalance between the two groups regarding the indicators of workflow links, network centrality and ties to the organizational hierarchy. Therefore, it is concluded that the Organizational chart, coupled to the findings from the focus group and survey instruments, provides additional evidence in support to Working Hypotheses 4.

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<sup>10</sup> These statements may appear to tread dangerously to undisciplined opinion -- the researcher's nemesis. However, even an objective observer can't help but to draw similar conclusions as those postulated above. The Org-Chart *does* reflect an unspoken emphasis. Whether intentional or not, the emphasis is there. How can the inclusion of 9 Staff Battalion Chief's by name, and the omission of 18 other equally ranked personnel otherwise be justified? There is a de facto statement being made: *Staff Battalion Chiefs are more important to the organization than Line Battalion Chiefs.*

## ***Research Results; Summing Up***

Table 6.7 represents the research evidence in support of the conceptual framework for this study.

**Table 6.7**  
**Research Evidence in**  
**Support of Working Hypotheses**

<b>Working Hypotheses</b>	<b>Focus Group(s)</b>	<b>Questionnaire</b>	<b>Document Analysis</b>
<b>Working Hypotheses 1:</b> <i>Group Identity and Membership</i>	Supports	Supports	N/A
<b>Working Hypotheses 2a:</b> <i>Goal Inconsistencies</i>	Supports	No Support	N/A
<b>Working Hypotheses 2b:</b> <i>Resource Competition</i>	Strong Support	Partial Support	N/A
<b>Working Hypotheses 3a, 3b:</b> <i>Strong Within-group Ties;</i> <i>Weak Between-group Ties</i>	Strong Supports	Supports	N/A
<b>Working Hypotheses 3c:</b> <i>Self-reinforcing Behaviors</i>	Strong Support	Partial Support	N/A
<b>Working Hypotheses 4:</b> <i>Power Asymmetry</i>	Strong Support	Minimal Support	Strong Support

### ***Focus Group(s)***

The focus group results provide interesting insight into the Line-Staff relationship within the Austin Fire Department. In contrast to the inconclusive evidence drawn from the questionnaire instrument, focus group data suggest that there may indeed exist the perception of conflict between Line and Staff within the AFD. Each of the multiple working hypotheses designed for this study are supported by focus group evidence: group phenomena important to the evolution of conflict between groups have been observed and supported...indicators suggesting the existence of power imbalances have been revealed...group tendencies to stereotype out-group members have been demonstrated.

Indeed, the focus group evidence *strongly* suggests that the fundamental elements of group conflict are in place and in operation. While the degree, or pervasiveness, of the conflict dynamic can only be inferred from the data, *it is clear from the focus group evidence that the perception of conflict exists between the Line and Staff Divisions within the Austin Fire Department.*<sup>11</sup>

### *Questionnaire*

Paradoxically, the overall results to the questionnaire are *mixed*. Working Hypotheses 1, concerning group membership and identification, is supported by the evidence. The data which tests Working Hypotheses 2a -- goal inconsistencies -- are surprisingly similar, suggesting that there is *not* a perceptual difference between Line and Staff concerning organizational goals. Thus, Working Hypotheses 2a receives no support by the questionnaire data. The data for Working Hypotheses 2b, which explores competition over resources, are ambivalent. It is clear from the evidence that Staff personnel possess greater budget authority than do Line, however, both groups perceive their ability to access information on organizational decisions equally. Thus, it can only be concluded that the survey reveals partial support for WH 2b. The data for Working Hypotheses 3a and 3b provide compelling evidence that within-group ties are strong within Line and Staff and that between-group ties are weak between Line and Staff. For the indicators of "contact" and "interaction" the evidence is in support of these hypotheses. Other indicators intended to measure the depth of the conflict dynamic are less compelling. However, the overall data tends to support Working Hypotheses 3a and 3b. Moreover, the results for Working Hypothesis 3c provide some support that tendencies to stereotype out-

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<sup>11</sup> Reader Beware: Focus group analysis is not an exact science and there are numerous ways in which a quote or dialogue on a particular subject may be interpreted. The reader is encouraged to examine the focus group transcripts in full first, and then assess the rigor of the analysis for herself. In the analysis of the focus group transcripts, this researcher strove to represent quotes in the context and spirit in which they were communicated. Much of the transcript dialogue misses the subtle nuances, flavor and feel that was present in the actual group meetings. Having been the facilitator of the meetings, the researcher has the

group members are present in the Line-Staff relationship. Finally, the data for Working Hypotheses 4 suggest that both Line and Staff perceive their levels of power equally in the context of “centrality” and “connection power.” There is evidence that Line personnel attend more meetings than staff, which suggests greater power, but these data aren’t compelling. Working Hypotheses 4 will therefore be considered only partially supported by the survey evidence.

Overall, then, the evidence revealed by the survey instrument provides only marginal support for the conceptual framework, suggesting that -- *based on the indicators designed for this study* -- conflict may not be an inherent dimension to the Line-Staff relationship within the AFD. It is obvious that the essential and primal elements for intergroup conflict to exist are in place; that is, the group delineation and boundary strengthening elements of *contact* and *interaction* exist. Also, there are some data that suggest that group stereotyping is in operation. However, the data doesn’t suggest that levels of conflict are significantly pervasive.<sup>12</sup>

### *Summary*

This chapter has discussed the results of the three data collection methods employed to test the working hypotheses designed for this study. Evidence in support of the conceptual framework have been presented and preliminary conclusions have been drawn. In Chapter Seven, an attempt to synthesize the data is offered and suggestions on the study’s value is presented.

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benefit to draw on his reflections of the context and flow of certain conversations. Much of the analysis reflects this researcher “feel.”

<sup>12</sup> As was recognized in the chapter on Methods, designing a questionnaire instrument for such an arguably qualitative study presents obvious operational problems. Were the survey questions appropriately designed to adequately measure the variables? Were the selected variables the best candidates to observe the phenomena under investigation? Can any survey instrument adequately measure group phenomena when the individual is the respondent? Do respondents perceive the question’s intent in a similar light as the researcher? These are all compelling questions that, unfortunately, can only be answered ex post facto. Hindsight has revealed some operationalization errors that may have skewed the results. This possibility was recognized at the outset of the investigation and was the driving force behind the design of multiple data-collection methodologies.

## Chapter Seven

### *Conclusions and Summary Remarks*

#### Conclusions

What can be said on the synthesis of the research results? Do they support or reject the conceptual framework designed for this study?

The answers to these questions depend upon the relative value one assigns to the multiple data-collection methodologies employed for this study. If an emphasis is placed on questionnaire results, then it must be concluded that the conceptual framework is only partially supported by the findings. If an emphasis is placed on the focus group results, it can be claimed that the conceptual framework was strongly supported by the evidence. Obviously, any emphasis on the document analysis alone would be incomplete. Each of the selected methods, as discussed in Chapter 4, possess inherent strengths and weaknesses. Viewed collectively, however, they present an interesting synergy that supports the following conclusions:

- 1) The functional categorizations of Line and Staff within the AFD *do* constitute groups and group members *do* recognize group participation.
- 2) The *perception* of goal incongruity exists within the AFD between Line and Staff *in spite of evidence that reveals a closely aligned goal hierarchy* between the two groups. This finding suggests that perceptual differences are created by group action -- a critical discovery in support of phenomenological group conflict.
- 3) Both the Line and Staff groups within the AFD perceive Staff as being more "in the loop." Furthermore, focus group content suggests that Staff members maintain a greater involvement in organizational information sharing, decision making and event scheduling. These levels of participation appear to be the result of membership within the functional category of Staff and suggest a significant asymmetry in power between the two groups.

- 4) Members of Line and Staff predominately interact with other organizational members from within their own functional group and this level of interaction promotes tendencies to amplify differences, distort information and foster negative perceptions between the two groups. Even though both the survey and focus group evidence seem to suggest that both groups perceive organizational events similarly, group perceptions of out-group member perceptions -- in other words, what *one* group perceives the *other* group to perceive -- are wildly paradoxical. This phenomenon is apparent within both groups.
- 5) Differences in functional roles appear to create tendencies toward ethnocentrism -- the favoring of a member's group status and role over another. This phenomena is prevalent in evidence for both Line and Staff, but appears to be most pervasive in the Staff functional group. The perceived differences in work-loads, involvement and "perspective" (i.e.; seeing the whole picture) tend to cause sentiments of resentment and feelings of under-appreciation within the Staff functional group. These sentiments cause Staff members to stereotype Line members which, in turn, tends to self-reinforce as within-group members continue to interact. Similarly, Line members have a tendency to focus on their role of emergency response, and while they view Staff initiatives as important, they believe that Line functions are the central mission of the department. Both of these examples represent *mobilization of bias* which is important to any claims of "conflict" between the two groups.
- 6) Both Staff and Line members recognize that a perceptual "Chasm" or "Rift" exists between the two groups.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps surprisingly, both groups further realize that the perceptual "rift" is predominantly the result of *perspective*. Staff members believe that Line members do not understand the Staff role because they haven't been there. Line members draw the *exact same conclusion*. However, this common ground did not deter

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<sup>1</sup> Staff members, in response to a direct question asking whether the "rift" exists, in general agreed that it does not. However, a close read of the subsequent dialogue contains many references, both direct and indirect, to a perceptual rift between the two groups. While they may claim that a rift does not exist, their words and behavior tend to contradict the claim.



phenomenological group processes from manifesting during group discussions, a sign that group dynamics of conflict are at work within the two groups.

7) There are appearances within departmental documents that an executive emphasis, or a premium, is placed on Staff roles over Line roles and that Staff positions possess greater ties to the hierarchy of the organization.

8) Line members categorically lump all Staff members in association with executive staff decisions, edicts, statements of policy and programs. Even though a Staff member may be charged with the implementation of an unpopular program by the executive staff, Line members will assign "responsibility" for that undesirable assignment to all members of Staff, whether their perceptions on the issue are in agreement or not.

9) There is a culture of "differentiation" within the Austin Fire Department where perceptions of cultural consensus are inconsistent throughout the organization. Consensus will likely be found only within the sub-cultural groups of Line and Staff.

These conclusions are safely and objectively drawn from the data and provide a coherent synthesis of the study's findings. But the question begs: *Is the relationship between Line and Staff within the Austin Fire Department characterized by conflict?*

To answer this question one must first remember that *conflict*, for the purposes of this study, is being explored inferentially. No statements of definition of conflict have been advanced within the study, only literature-supported indicators of group action that *suggest* the existence of conflict have been advanced. Therefore, conflict is a condition that must be inferred from the research.

Based on the literature's definition(s) of group action which engender conflictual relations between groups, the results of this study suggest that conflict *is* a dimension of the Line-Staff relationship within the Austin Fire Department. It may subsequently be

stated, therefore, that the conceptual framework designed for this study has been supported.<sup>2</sup>

### Implications

Organizational change and Change Management is a process that has confused and inspired Public Administrators for some time. Change, it is argued, is good for an organization -- it fights complacency, strengthens market viability, overturns unnecessary traditions and revitalizes the organization. Indeed, organizational change -- or in contemporary vernacular, *organizational development* -- is often promoted as the essential managerial tool which governs an organization's existence. The failure to recognize internal and external influences for change -- the indicators of a changing environment -- can quite literally destroy an organization.<sup>3</sup>

The Public Service of the 1990's exists in a changing environment. Exponential advances in technology and information, increases in alternative service providers for "traditional" public "goods," and, perhaps most importantly, "customer" expectations that demand greater efficiency in government have all demanded a new look at service-delivery methodologies. The public sector can no longer hide under the protective umbrella of "Government." In order to remain viable, public agencies are being forced to respond to their changing environment(s).

The Fire Service is responding to a changing environment. The traditional "reaction model" which placed emergency-response at the center of the industry's existence is being supplanted by a new model. This new model promotes hazard intervention, prevention, public awareness and technology as its central elements. Concurrently,

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<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that the *degree* of conflict within the Line-Staff relationship is not investigated by this study. One can draw unsupported conclusions as to the level of dysfunction caused by the conflict, but empirical evidence to support such claims are not provided here. The degree of conflict and it's influence on the productivity of the department would be an interesting follow-up study.

<sup>3</sup> Almost any contemporary text on Organizational Management recognizes the importance of change and change management to the modern organization. See for example, Donnelly, Gibson, Ivancevich; *Fundamentals of Management*, Second Ed., 1987.

tangential elements within this new model advance notions of “customer sensitivity,” “diversity,” and “quality service delivery.” Viewed as a continuum, the new, “pre-action” model in organizational mission is quite distant from the traditional “reaction” emphasis of departments. Or, stated in clear language, this re-focus constitutes a *big change* for the Fire Service, in both mission, culture and structure.

*The Austin Fire Department is, by most standards, at the vanguard of this industry-wide change process.*

This study is not about change in the Fire Service. This study is about conflict. However, the 1990’s represent an age of dramatic industry-wide re-engineering -- a time of profound rethinking of fire department organizational mission, structure and vision. The Austin Fire Department is leading this charge and has initiated numerous conceptual and structural changes to address the new vision. This study has revealed both structural and phenomenological evidence of the *existence of conflict* between the functional categories of Line and Staff within the Austin Fire Department. This study has also advanced *root causes* to explain how this conflict may emerge and amplify. Recognizing that conflict is frequently enhanced by change, the industry-wide implication of this study becomes apparent. As Shields notes,

“Leaders within an agency should keep the pulse on the nature of conflict within their organization because negative aspects of conflict can be problematic. These negative aspects are likely to manifest themselves in times of change.” (Shields; interview, 1997)

The changing Fire Service can learn from the Austin experience. Using the antecedents to conflict between the functional groups of Line and Staff presented in this study, progressive administrators can develop preventive strategies to intercede in the conflict process before it becomes problematic. As we have learned, phenomenological group processes of conflict exist mostly as a function of perception, and these perceptions are enhanced or reduced by both structural and phenomenological processes. Most interestingly -- and perhaps most importantly to the value of this study for the industry -- *is*

*the recognition that these structural and phenomenological processes to conflict are well within the control of the creative administrator.* By initiating aggressive conflict-intervention strategies which address the roots causes of intergroup conflict advanced within this study, Fire Service administrators may ward off the development of dysfunctional organizational conflict. This study provides the essential understanding to organizational conflict between the functional groups of Line and Staff. Therefore, the tools for creative conflict intervention are provided.

### Summary Remarks

It is arguable that this study ventures into the realm of the arcane. Similar to the bored philosopher's tautological abstraction: *If you are looking at a blue sky, then, the sky is blue* -- this researcher can just hear the busy practitioner's exclamation after reading this study: "So, what your telling me then, is that the functional groups of Line and Staff are acting like groups because they're groups? So what!" Practitioners want practical results to organizational problems, not abstract philosophical musings. And rightfully so. Thus, one must ask, *what does this study have to offer the field of public administration?*

As was discussed in the introductory chapter to this research, this study explores *root causes* into organizational behavior. It was further postulated that root causes should hold a position of importance to public administrators as their identification is important to explaining organizational phenomena. Actually, this concept isn't new to management. Indeed, one of the tenets to the successful Total Quality Management movement of the late 1980's and early 90's is the clear identification of organizational problems *prior* to taking steps to address them. Too many organizations and administrators, argue quality expositors, are in the habit of initiating programs, projects and initiatives in response to organizational issues that do not address the *fundamental problem*. (Peters and Waterman, 1982) These uninformed programs may simply serve as temporary band-aids which provide surface dressing over the real issue, perhaps even complicating matters further.

Similarly, the very strange, but very real, perceptual dichotomy between the functional groups of Line and Staff within the Fire Service has been recognized for some time, yet, no scholarly attempts have been advanced to *understand it* even though steps have been taken to *address it*. . (Paulsgrove, 1992)<sup>4</sup> This researcher wanted to know *why* the dichotomy is there...to meet the quality expositor's challenge and ask the question, "What's the *root* of this problem?"

Therefore, the value of this study lies in its inquisitiveness, in its unassuming and exploratory approach which, de facto, states that surface explanations won't do. Inquisitiveness, it can be argued, must be a central element in post-modern administration, even if that inquisitiveness branches out into deep theoretical understandings. This is so because inquisitiveness yields true understanding, which paves the way toward *real* solutions to *real* problems. In today's world of real problems, the value of this statement becomes apparent.

So, while the practitioner may exclaim, *What's the value?* -- in response to this study; the researcher may rejoin, *What's the price of misunderstanding?* The price of misunderstanding, it can be argued, is ignorance. And as the Grangerfords and Shepherdsons have learned, ignorance can be dangerous.

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<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Robin Paulsgrove, former Fire Chief of the Austin Fire Department, published a series in Fire Chief magazine titled *Take This Job and Love It*. The article examined initiatives taken by different departments across the country to try to make Staff assignments more desirable to members. The only suggestion Paulsgrove advanced for why there was a "desirability gap" was a simple assumption that it was related to scheduling differences. The root problem -- *Why is there a desirability gap between Line and Staff?* -- was not addressed.

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## **Appendix A**



Department of  
Political Science

September 7, 1997

Dear *Select* AFD Personnel:

You have been selected to participate in a study being conducted by the Southwest Texas State University. This study is designed to investigate the relationships between functional groups within Fire Service Organizations. In particular, this study intends to explore specific dimensions to the Operations-Staff relationship within the Austin Fire Department. *Your assistance is needed to complete this important study.*

Included with this letter you will find a 20-question survey that we would like you to respond to. We respect your time and have made this questionnaire **SHORT**. A simple check-the-box questionnaire, this instrument should take you no longer than 10 minutes to complete.

It should be noted that this questionnaire is not designed to be an internal tool for organizational decision-making. Rather, this questionnaire serves as a scholastic inquiry designed to advance our understanding of fire service administration. We hope the findings drawn from this survey may reveal new and unique explanations to organizational behavior.

With the support and cooperation of Fire Chief Gary Warren, I am asking you to please be a part of this interesting study by taking the next ten minutes to fill out this questionnaire. Please look over the instructions, as certain terms and concepts are presented for you to better understand the questions. Once you have completed the survey, simply place it in the provided envelope and put it in the Pony. That's it.

I would like to thank each of you for taking the time to be a part of this academic study. A summary of the results of this investigation will be made available once it has been completed.

Sincerely,

*Patricia M. Shields*

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SWT is a member of the Texas State University System.

# Questionnaire Terms & Concepts

**Thank-you** for participating in this study by filling out this **SHORT** questionnaire! Please review the following pointers before you begin.

1. This is an anonymous instrument; please do not put your name or any personal information on the questionnaire or return envelope.
2. For each question you will be given 5 possible responses which range from "Never" to "Always." Obviously, a literal interpretation of these benchmarks is not expected, (*never* say "never," right?) What we would like for you to do is choose the response that *best* represents your perspective and feelings for each given question. For example, after you read the question that asks if you attend work-related meetings, if your initial reaction is, "*I'm always in meetings!*" then the proper response for you would be "Always." You certainly aren't *always* in meetings, but the response is well aligned to your feelings about the question. Remember, your first impulse is usually the best.
3. You might see a couple of terms that appear vague. The following list of definitions is provided to avoid confusion.
  - \*\* Functional Group:** For the purposes of this survey, a "Functional Group" is any intra-organizational collection of employees working in close proximity toward a common goal. For example, Medical Operations, Training and Public Education are functional groups. Staff and Operations are mega-functional groups with numerous smaller functional groups within them.
  - \*\* Contact:** For the purposes of this survey, "Contact" refers to any activity that brings you within physical proximity of another employee. For example, attending Standards of Care classes brings you in "contact" with employees assigned to Medical Operations. Contact does not imply interaction.
  - \*\* Interaction:** For the purposes of this survey, "Interaction" refers to any work-related activity that involves mutual cooperation between employees toward some work-related goal. For example, sitting on the V.A.R.B. involves "interaction" between employees from several different "functional groups."
  - \*\* Staff:** The "functional group" which consists of any uniformed AFD employee working a 40hr-week schedule.
  - \*\* Operations:** The "functional group" which consists of any uniformed AFD employee working a 56hr-week, shift schedule.

**THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY!!**

# Questionnaire

1. Where are you currently assigned?

- ☐ Staff      ☐ Operations

2. Do you feel as if you have a voice in the direction of the AFD; that is, do you feel that you are allowed to **participate in important decisions** that affect you and the members of this organization?

- ☐ Never      ☐ Rarely      ☐ Sometimes      ☐ Frequently      ☐ Always

3. Do AFD members assigned to *Operations* have a **strong voice in the direction** of this organization?

- ☐ Never      ☐ Rarely      ☐ Sometimes      ☐ Frequently      ☐ Always

4. Do AFD members assigned to *Staff* have a **strong voice in the direction** of this organization?

- ☐ Never      ☐ Rarely      ☐ Sometimes      ☐ Frequently      ☐ Always

5. Do you feel as if you are kept **informed** about important decisions that affect you and the Austin Fire Department?

- ☐ Never      ☐ Rarely      ☐ Sometimes      ☐ Frequently      ☐ Always

6. If desired, are you able to gain **access to information** on important decisions that affect you within the AFD?

- ☐ Never      ☐ Rarely      ☐ Sometimes      ☐ Frequently      ☐ Always

7. Do you retain **budget authority**; that is, do you control a portion of the organizational budget or do you make decisions that affect the disposition of organizational funds?

- ☐ Never      ☐ Rarely      ☐ Sometimes      ☐ Frequently      ☐ Always

8. How often do you **interact** with members of *Staff* on work-related issues?

- ☐ Never      ☐ Rarely      ☐ Sometimes      ☐ Frequently      ☐ Always

*Please Turn to Page 2*

9. How often do you **Interact** with members of *Operations* on work-related issues?

☐ Never      ☐ Rarely      ☐ Sometimes      ☐ Frequently      ☐ Always

10. During a typical day at work, how often do you come into **contact** with members of *Staff*?

☐ Never      ☐ Rarely      ☐ Sometimes      ☐ Frequently      ☐ Always

11. During a typical day at work, how often do you come into **contact** with members of *Operations*?

☐ Never      ☐ Rarely      ☐ Sometimes      ☐ Frequently      ☐ Always

12. In your opinion, when you **Interact** with a coworker from *Staff*, is the interaction friendly and cooperative with a mutual understanding that you are both working toward a common goal?

☐ Never      ☐ Rarely      ☐ Sometimes      ☐ Frequently      ☐ Always

13. In your opinion, when you **Interact** with a coworker from *Operations*, is the interaction friendly and cooperative with a mutual understanding that you are both working toward a common goal?

☐ Never      ☐ Rarely      ☐ Sometimes      ☐ Frequently      ☐ Always

14. There is an old saying: *You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours*. Essentially, this saying communicates that a favor received encourages a favor in return. How often do you find yourself doing **favours** (personal or professional) for coworkers assigned to *Staff*?

☐ Never      ☐ Rarely      ☐ Sometimes      ☐ Frequently      ☐ Always

14b. ...for coworkers assigned to *Operations*?

☐ Never      ☐ Rarely      ☐ Sometimes      ☐ Frequently      ☐ Always

15. Do you ever catch yourself thinking: *Those folks in Operations don't have a clue about what's really important to this organization!*

☐ Never      ☐ Rarely      ☐ Sometimes      ☐ Frequently      ☐ Always

16. Do you ever catch yourself thinking: *Those folks in Staff don't have a clue about what's really important to this organization!*

☐ Never      ☐ Rarely      ☐ Sometimes      ☐ Frequently      ☐ Always

*Please Turn to Page 3*

17. The AFD is separated into numerous functional groups, sections and divisions, (such as Training, Haz-mat Engineering, Code Compliance, Administration, etc.). How often do you find yourself **interacting** with members from these other department areas on work-related issues, (special projects, programs, studies, etc.)?

☐ Never      ☐ Rarely      ☐ Sometimes      ☐ Frequently      ☐ Always

18. In a typical week, do you find yourself attending work-related **meetings**?

☐ Never      ☐ Rarely      ☐ Sometimes      ☐ Frequently      ☐ Always

19. It is widely accepted that individuals with work/personal connections to people in positions of authority possess greater influence – and therefore, greater power – than those individuals without similar connections. Recognizing this, how do you rate your level of "**connection power**" within the AFD?

☐ Doesn't Exist      ☐ Poor      ☐ Moderate      ☐ Healthy      ☐ Very Strong

20. What is your rank within the Austin Fire Department? *Optional*

☐ Firefighter      ☐ Specialist      ☐ Lieutenant      ☐ Captain      ☐ Battalion Chief

*You have almost completed the questionnaire!  
A very short exercise remains (approx. 2 minutes).  
Please turn to Page 4 to complete the Survey.  
Thank-you!*

The following list contains a number of **organizational priorities (goals)** promoted by fire departments. Below the list are two columns of blanks. Using the provided list of priorities, in Column One, rank-order the priorities -- by order of importance -- according to how you *perceive them to exist* within the AFD at this time; (in other words, how do you perceive the current administration rank-orders these priorities). In Column Two, rank-order the priorities according to how you *believe they should exist* within the AFD at this time.

Public Education  
Pre-hospital Emergency Care (Emergency Medical Services)  
Fire Mitigation and Emergency Response  
Employee Development  
Firefighter Safety and Fitness  
Fire Prevention and Pre-incident Intervention  
Other (Your input)

**Column One**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_

**Column Two**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_

**THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR  
PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY!!**



**Table A.1**  
*Line and Staff Responses to Questionnaire,*  
Statistical Mean

Question / Indicator	Line Mean Value	Staff Mean Value
Q-2: "Involvement"	-.60	-.29
Q-3: "Involvement"	-.54	-.43
Q-4: "Involvement"	.39	-.25
Q-5: "Information as Resource"	.60	.40
Q-6: "Information as Resource"	.45	.46
Q-7: "Budget Authority as Resource"	<b>-1.72</b>	-.79
Q-8: "Staff Interaction"	-.24	<b>1.06</b>
Q-9: "Line Interaction"	<b>1.39</b>	.23
Q-10 : "Staff Contact"	-.27	<b>1.62</b>
Q-11: "Line Contact"	<b>1.69</b>	.51
Q-12: "Staff Quality of Interaction"	<b>1.03</b>	<b>1.21</b>
Q-13: "Line Quality of Interaction"	<b>1.36</b>	.79
Q-14a: "Staff Favors"	-.69	-.21
Q-14b: "Line Favors"	-.27	-.34
Q-15: "Stereotype of Line"	-.72	-.19
Q-16: "Stereotype of Staff"	-.18	-.55
Q-17: "Workflow Linkages"	0	.32
Q-18: "Meetings as Power"	.03	.43
Q-19: "Connection Power"	-.12	-.15

N=80

**Table A.2**  
**Line Responses to Questionnaire,**  
**Percent Distribution and Statistical Mean**

Question	<i>Never</i> -2	<i>Rarely</i> -1	<i>Sometimes</i> 0	<i>Frequently</i> 1	<i>Always</i> 2	Mean Value	Working Hypotheses
Q-2	15.15%	36.36%	42.42%	6.06%	0%	-.60	WH4
Q-3	12.12%	42.42%	33.33%	12.12%	0%	-.54	WH4
Q-4	6.06%	9.09%	33.33%	42.42%	9.09%	.39	WH4
Q-5	6.06%	9.09%	33.33%	42.42%	9.09%	.60	WH2b
Q-6	3.03%	9.09%	39.39%	42.42%	6.06%	.45	WH2b
Q-7	72.72%	27.27%	3.03%	0%	0%	<b>-1.72</b>	WH2b
Q-8	9.09%	33.33%	30.30%	27.27%	0%	-.24	WH3a WH3b
Q-9	0%	3.03%	6.06%	39.39%	51.51%	<b>1.39</b>	WH3a WH3b
Q-10	0%	48.48%	27.27%	21.21%	0%	-.27	WH3a WH3b
Q-11	0%	3.03%	3.03%	15.15%	78.78%	<b>1.69</b>	WH3a WH3b
Q-12	0%	3.03%	18.18%	39.39%	33.33%	<b>1.03</b>	WH3a WH3b
Q-13	0%	0%	9.09%	45.45%	45.45%	<b>1.36</b>	WH3a WH3b
Q-14a	18.18%	45.45%	33.33%	12.12%	0%	-.69	WH3a WH3b
Q-14b	6.06%	33.33%	42.42%	18.18%	0%	-.27	WH3a WH3b
Q-15	18.18%	45.45%	21.21%	9.09%	0%	-.72	WH3c
Q-16	6.06%	39.39%	24.24%	27.27%	3.03%	-.18	WH3c
Q-17	0%	24.24%	51.51%	18.18%	3.03%	0	WH4
Q-18	3.03%	27.27%	36.36%	24.24%	6.06%	.03	WH4
Q-19	12.12%	15.15%	57.57%	27.27%	0%	-.12	WH4

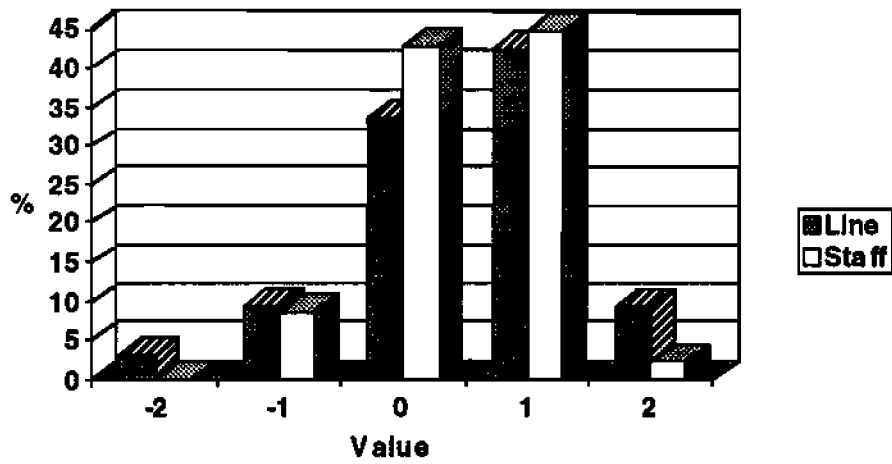
N=80

**Table A.3**  
**Staff Responses to Questionnaire**  
**Percent Distribution and Statistical Mean**

Question	<i>Never</i> -2	<i>Rarely</i> -1	<i>Sometimes</i> 0	<i>Frequently</i> 1	<i>Always</i> 2	Mean Value	Working Hypotheses
Q-2	8.51%	29.78%	46.8%	12.76%	2.12%	-.29	WH4
Q-3	8.51%	36.17%	48.93%	2.12%	4.25%	-.43	WH4
Q-4	8.51%	25.53%	51.06%	12.76%	2.12%	-.25	WH4
Q-5	0%	8.51%	42.55%	44.68%	2.12%	.40	WH2b
Q-6	0%	14.89%	31.91%	44.68%	8.51%	.46	WH2b
Q-7	48.93%	12.76%	17.02%	10.63%	10.63%	-.79	WH2b
Q-8	2.12%	8.51%	10.63%	38.29%	40.42%	<b>1.06</b>	WH3a WH3b
Q-9	0%	17.02%	44.68%	36.17%	2.12%	.23	WH3a WH3b
Q-10	0%	2.12%	2.12%	25.53%	70.21%	<b>1.62</b>	WH3a WH3b
Q-11	0%	10.63%	31.91%	53.19%	4.25%	.51	WH3a WH3b
Q-12	0%	0%	10.63%	53.19%	34.04%	<b>1.21</b>	WH3a WH3b
Q-13	0%	4.25%	31.91%	44.68%	19.14%	.79	WH3a WH3b
Q-14a	6.4%	34%	34%	25.53%	0%	-.21	WH3a WH3b
Q-14b	10.63%	29.78%	36.17%	17.02%	0%	-.34	WH3a WH3b
Q-15	8.51%	34.04%	38.29%	27.65%	2.12%	-.19	WH3c
Q-16	8.51%	46.80%	36.17%	4.25%	2.12%	-.55	WH3c
Q-17	0%	12.76%	44.68%	40.42%	2.12%	.32	WH4
Q-18	2.12%	8.51%	36.17%	51.06%	2.12%	.43	WH4
Q-19	6.38%	31.91%	34.04%	25.53%	2.12%	-.15	WH4

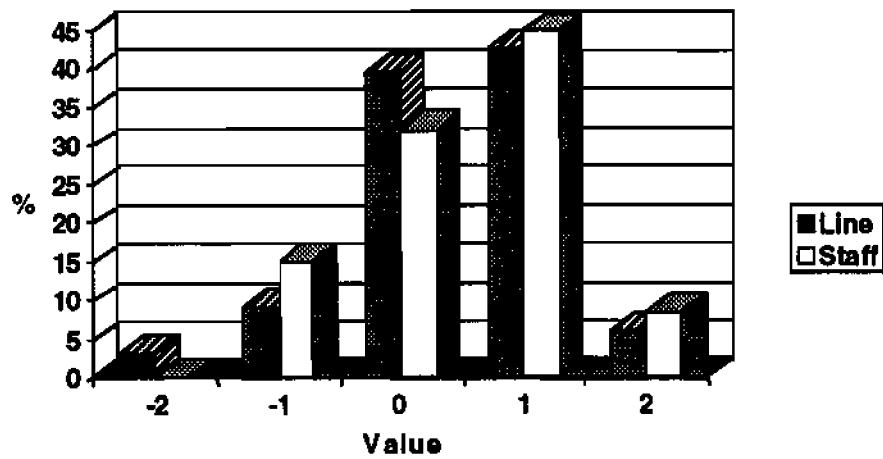
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Graph A.1  
"Information"



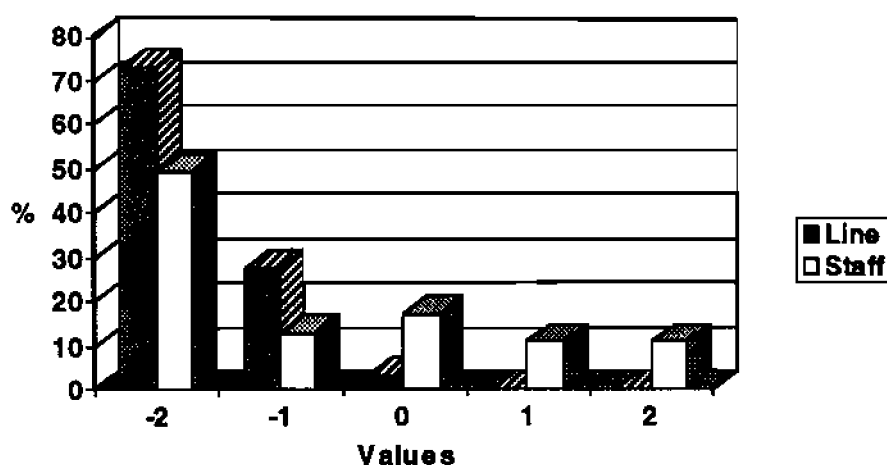
5. *Do you feel as if you are kept informed about important decisions that affect you and the AFD?*

Graph A.2  
"Information"



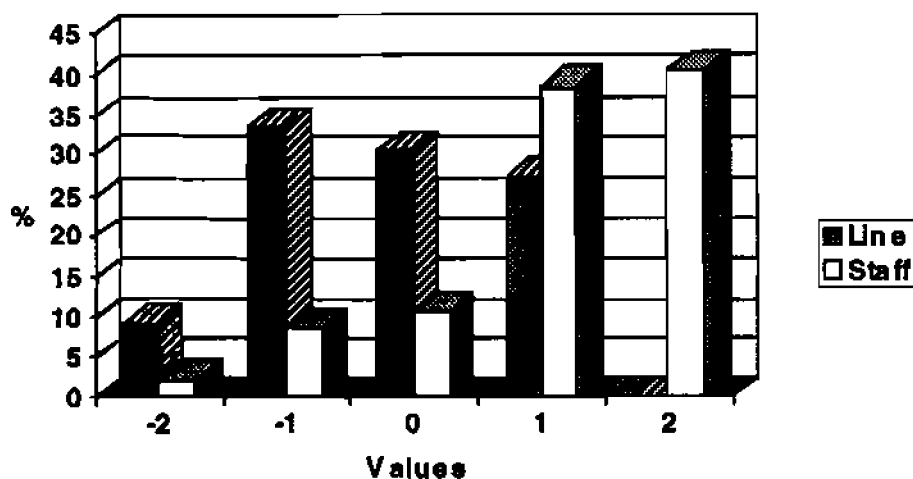
6. *If desired, are you able to gain access to information on important decisions that affect you within the AFD?*

Graph A.3  
"Budget Authority"



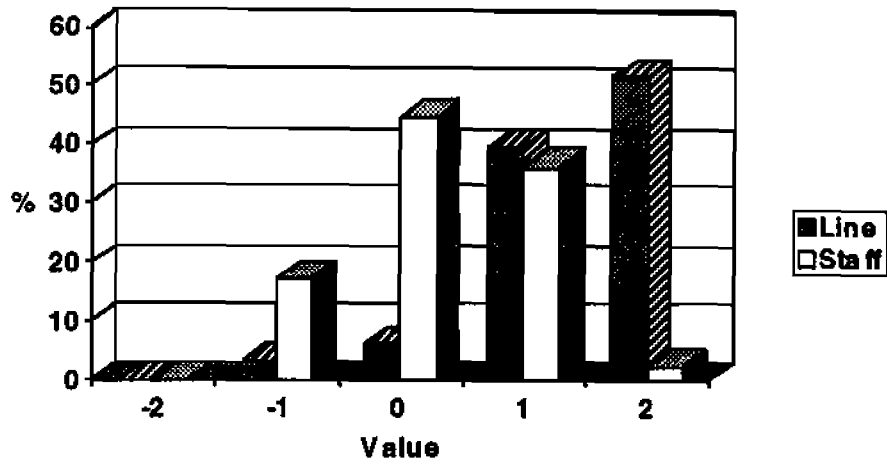
7. Do you retain budget authority; that is, do you control a portion of the organizational budget or do you make decisions that affect the disposition of organizational funds?

Graph A.4  
"Interaction"



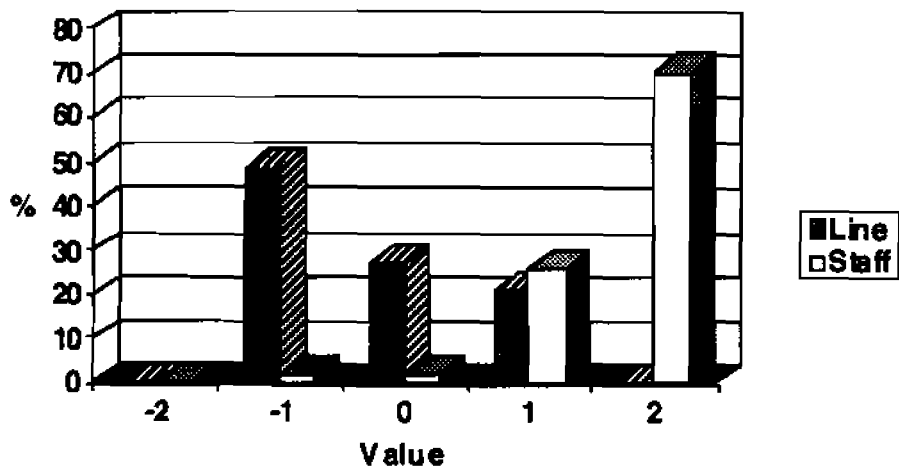
8. How often do you interact with members of Staff on work-related issues?

Graph A.5  
"Interaction"



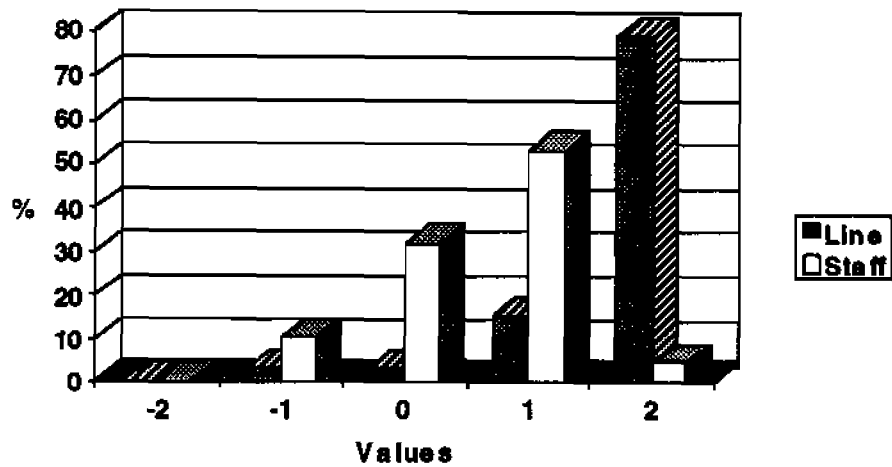
9. *How often do you interact with members of Operations on work-related issues?*

Graph A.6  
"Contact"



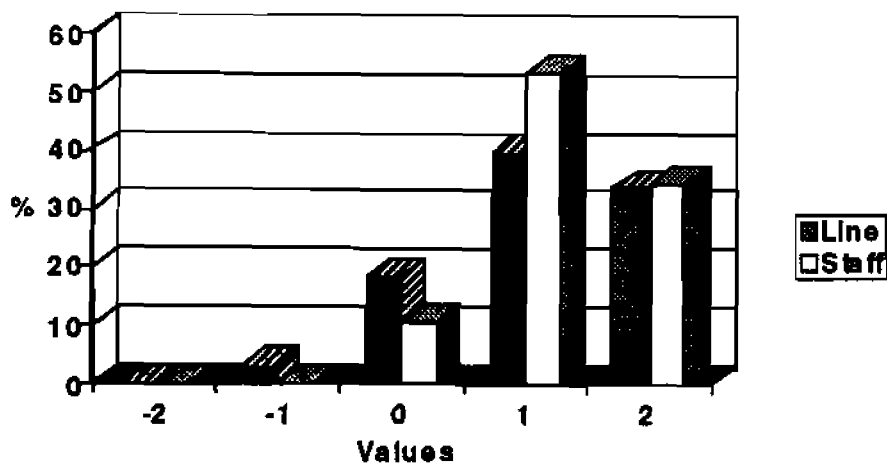
10. *During a typical day at work, how often do you come into contact with members of Staff?*

**Graph A.7**  
**"Contact"**



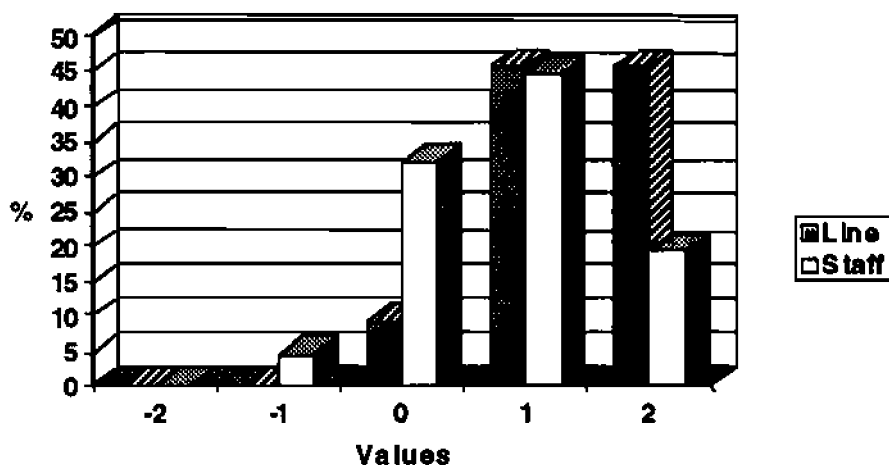
*11. During a typical day at work, how often do you come into contact with members of Operations?*

**Graph A.8**  
**"Interaction Quality"**



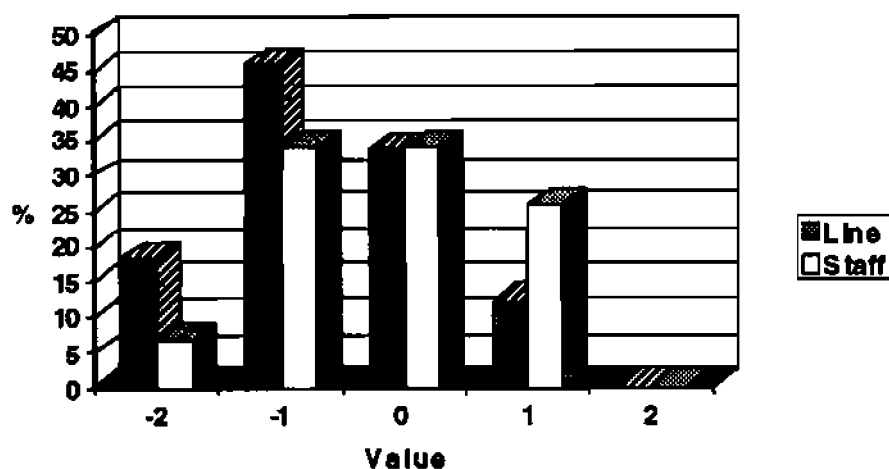
*12. When you interact with a coworker from Staff, is the interaction friendly and cooperative with a mutual understanding that you are both working toward a common goal?*

Graph A.9  
"Interaction Quality"



13. When you interact with a coworker from Operations, is the interaction friendly and cooperative with a mutual understanding that you are both working toward a common goal?

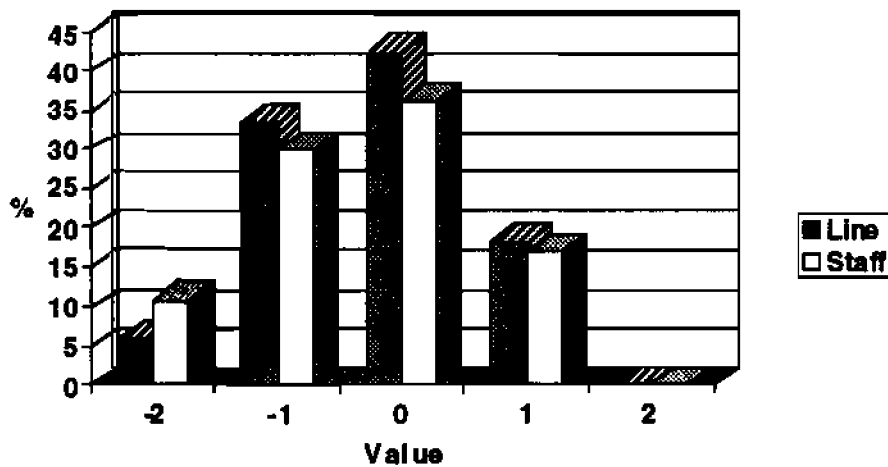
Graph A.10  
"Reciprocity"



14(a). There is an old saying: "You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours." Essentially, this saying communicates that a favor received encourages a favor in return. How often do you find yourself doing favors for coworkers assigned to Staff?

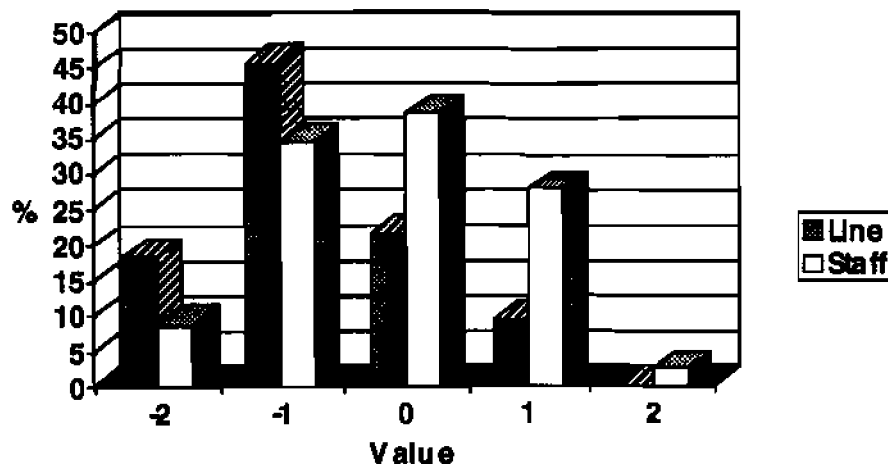


**Graph A.11**  
**"Reciprocity"**



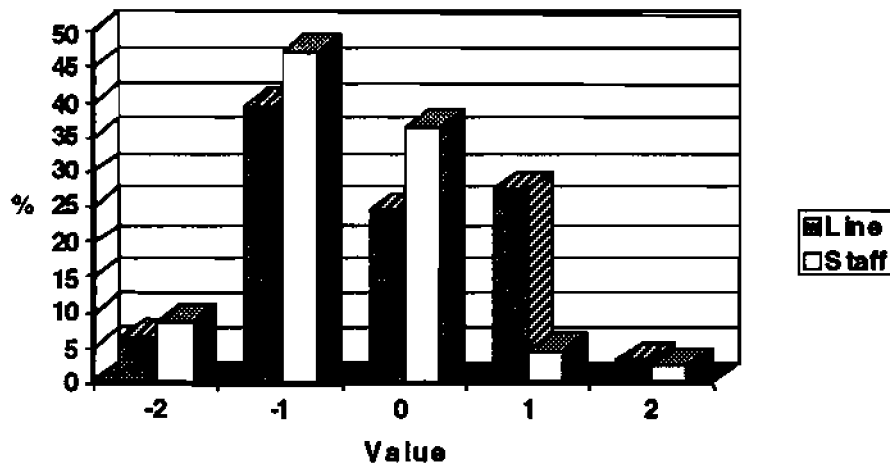
*14(b). There is an old saying: "You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours." Essentially, this saying communicates that a favor received encourages a favor in return. How often do you find yourself doing favors for coworkers assigned to Operations?*

**Graph A.12**  
**"Stereotype"**



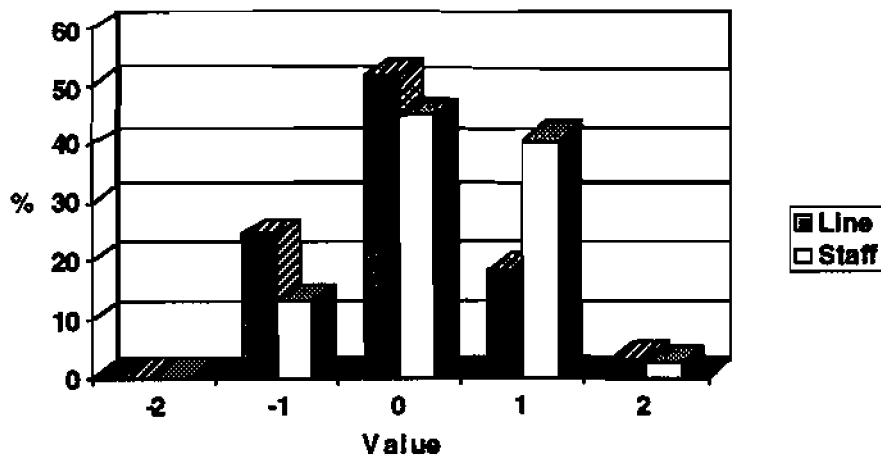
*15. Do you ever catch yourself thinking: "Those folks in Operations don't have a clue about what's really important to this organization?"*

Graph A.13  
"Stereotype"



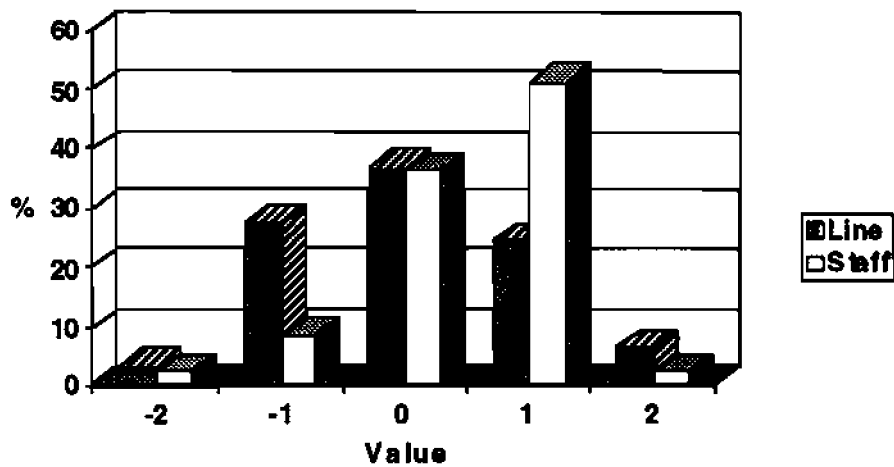
16. Do you ever catch yourself thinking: "Those folks in Staff don't have a clue about what's really important to this organization?"

Graph A.14  
"Workflow Linkages"



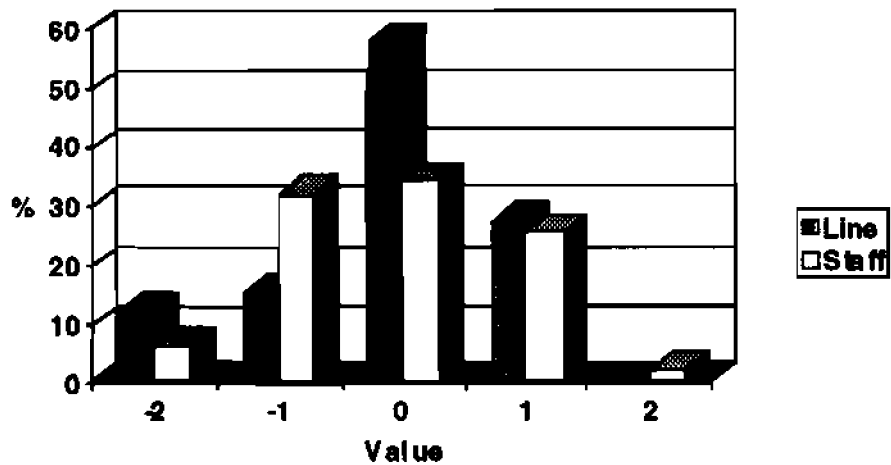
17. The AFD is separated into numerous functional groups, sections and divisions. How often do you find yourself interacting with members from these other department areas on work-related issues?

**Graph A.15**  
**"Meetings"**



*18. In a typical week, do you find yourself attending work-related meetings?*

**Graph A.16**  
**"Connection Power"**



*19. It is widely accepted that individuals with work/personal connections to people in positions of authority possess greater influence -- and therefore greater power -- than those individuals without similar connections. Recognizing this, how do you rate your level of "connection power" within the AFD?*

## **Appendix B**

## FOCUS GROUP - STAFF

**FACILITATOR:** Why are you here? Really, this is a personal favor to me, and I'd like to thank you for agreeing to do this. This is obviously not something the department is requiring you to do. This is the capstone to my master's program which I began in 1990. And it's for Southwest Texas, and they require you to conduct some original research, preferably related to your field in order for you to graduate. That's what this is. Probably a lot of you, I know some of you, have received one of my questionnaires. And this focus group research is intended to supplement the questionnaire research. So, that's what we're doing here. It's about ten after one. I promised you guys an hour. I'll keep it as close to an hour as I can. Yesterday, it took us an hour and five minutes. With that in mind, when I present an issue, and we begin discussing an issue, if we deviate from it or we head off down a different direction where I don't want it to go, please bear with me if I jump in, and go ahead and redirect us back to the issue that I want to discuss, or maybe introduce a different issue. And that's just purely in the interest of time. Any questions? No. All right. Then, let's begin. My research project is in general on group dynamics in an organizational setting. In particular, what I'm investigating is the relationship and the dynamics of the relationship between line or "*Operations*" in our vernacular, and *Staff* within the Austin Fire Department. And one of the presumptions that is driving this research, is that this relationship is characterized by conflict. I base this assumption on my personal years of experience in the Fire Department as I've moved from *Operations* to *Staff*, and then back to *Operations*, and then back into *Staff* for special assignments, and so forth. What I've seen and what I've experienced and observed is that old saying, "Where you stand depends upon where you sit," seems to be definitely operative in this department. In other words, people's perception and perspectives on organizational events and activities of things that are going on, and also, their perception of the other functional group -- in other words, if you're in *Staff* your perception of *Operations*, or if you're in *Operations* your perception of *Staff* -- seems to change depending on whether you're assigned currently to *Operations* or you're assigned into *Staff*. And in my experience, it seems like it's created this chasm, this rift, or this negative energy between the two groups. I've seen it characterized in such statements as when I was in *Staff* I would hear people say, "You know, those bozos in *Operations* are lazy. They just watch TV. They have no idea what we do down here, what it takes to run a department, what it takes to run a budget." The opposite side of that coin is you hear folks in *Operations* saying "You know, those people in *Staff* have no respect for what we do around here. They just issue new edicts, and new programs, and projects like Total Quality Management or diversity of whatever, and just throw them on our plate and expect us to do them." That's the type of attitude and perception that I've observed. I don't know if that's an accurate assumption or not. That's why we're here. That's an assumption. What I want to ask while we're having this group here today is to see if that is your perception. Do you perceive that there is a chasm or a rift between *Operations* and *Staff* in AFD, or even a negative energy?

And if so, how would you describe it, and why do you think it exists? What are any personal experiences that you've had that would suggest that it does or it doesn't exist? That's the first issue. That's the first thing I'd like to talk about. Does anybody have any thoughts on that? No thoughts on that. Share them with me, Bob? Anybody? Let's hear it.

**R:** I used to think that *Staff* people didn't do anything. You know you'd go to get clothing out of administration, and they'd make you fill out some paperwork and then they'd make you go some place. It was just like they were giving you the run around on that. I think I've had the opportunity to be on both sides of the playing field, also. And I have to agree with you. I've had the perception that a few guys out in *Operations* are lazy. And then when I get out there, and I have to depend on them in a fire, I'm awfully glad they are there and my attitude changes from, "He sure is lazy. He's a nice lazy guy." I'm glad I have that lazy guy here. I have to agree with that. I've felt those differences, also.

**FACILITATOR:** As you moved from one position to the other? Yeah. Would you in your opinion agree or disagree that there is like a rift or some, I guess, perceptual separation between the two?

**R:** I think if there is it exists on an individual basis. Maybe it deals with personalities. I'm not sure how an individual perceives an individuals' expectations. A guy goes to admin to get something, and he demands service. "I'm a line guy. I want it, and I want it right now." And so, he conveys a certain attitude to somebody over in administration. And they receive that attitude, and they log him in their memory bank, and then it's generalized to where it's everybody in *Operations* is that way. I think it is individuals. Most of us have been on both sides of the playing field, also. And we know that there's -- we know what processes are involved. So, I don't feel the rift. I don't know that maybe I've been on a *Staff* assignment too long to perceive a bigger rift than is actually there.

**R:** I don't think there's a rift either. I know when I was in *Operations*, I had the same attitude about *Staff* as others. October is a good month to explore that. Pub Ed has all these assignments. Why aren't they doing it? Why do we have the Pub Ed section? We're training. Why do we have to do this? Until you get into these fields, and you realize that in Pub Ed you're limited in your personnel. And in order to do the program you're trying to do, you need to bring in the *Operations* people more into training. *Operations* has to participate in training. I think that a lot of people that have never been in *Staff* may have some preconceived notions. But I feel that people who have been in *Staff* and gone back out they say things, but really they know exactly what you have to do in *Staff* and how limited our *Staff* support is for what we do.

**R:** You have to understand, though, in your comments you made at the beginning of the deal about *Staff*, saying they're lazy. And then, you said that *Operations* sat

on these programs. The reason that other view is coming out from *Operations* is that they've never been in *Staff*. The ones that are saying that have never been here. That's why they don't know why these programs are coming.

R: I agree with that.

R: The reason we're saying that they may be lazy is because we've been out there. We really know what they're doing. You know we've been there at the fire station. When we say that comment, it really doesn't mean that they're lazy. It just means that they're not doing as much --

R: Quite as much.

R: The thing is most people in combat have blinders on. They have no idea at all of how this Fire Department works. I can tell you, if you go out there, and you point to somebody that's never been to *Staff*, and you say we'll talk about how a work order runs. They won't be able to tell you. They don't know how that shop operates. In fact, they don't know how training operates. I'll tell you what, if you get somebody that comes down to training that's made a test and been in the Fire Department for a while, the first thing he'll tell you is that, "Wow, this ain't like I used to remember it." It's because it ain't like he used to remember it. He's still got his mind trained the way it was when he came in. \_\_\_\_\_, they don't know. I don't know if it's so much a rift, but that's where the conflict comes in.

R: Maybe it's not so much a rift as Bob was saying. But more of a like a lack knowledge, a lack of perception.

R: A lack of communication between --

{Everyone talking at once}

**FACILITATOR:** Go for it, Bob.

R: Thank you. Also, we have human nature. We have the tendency to focus on the negative. So, if you were talking to a whole group of people in *Operations*, and you get a negative comment from one that says, "That's not our job. We shouldn't be doing this." And the others who don't necessarily feel that way, they don't say anything. Well, we zoom in, and we focus on that negative comment. And then, so we carry that with us.

**FACILITATOR:** Well, let me run with that thought real quick, and this is for everybody. Do you think that because of, for example, your proximity to *Staff* folks and operation's proximity to operation's folks, that that phenomenon you're discussing where one person shoots out a negative comment and people latch on it, do you think that has a tendency to amplify?

{Everyone talking at once}

R: Yeah.

R: It's called the grapevine. Sure.

R: I think a negative attitude of a station or shift even will feed off of each other.

R: Twenty-four hours at a time.

R: Because that person is --

R: Because of peer group pressure or a need to belong or --

**FACILITATOR:** Right.

R: And then, that grows.

**FACILITATOR:** Have you all experienced that in *Staff* in terms of your perception toward operation?

R: As far as what?

**FACILITATOR:** This tendency to where, let's say you're in a group of *Staff* folks, and somebody said, "You know, those guys have no understanding of what it requires for us to do this." And we know what they're doing in that fire station. Everybody starts laughing, and you're like, "Yeah, we remember what it's like. They're lazy." You know what I'm saying? It has a tendency to amplify. That's what I'm asking because the *Operations* folks --

R: We do the same thing.

**FACILITATOR:** Right.

R: Do ya'll do that back there?

R: I've never seen people over at that office do that in the mornings. {Sarcastic}

{Everyone talking at once - Laughter}

R: Not necessarily so much as hammering guys in *Operations*. We're talking more about contractors, and each other.



**R:** But you tend to do that. You talk about like if somebody comes in and they call or complain. Operations personnel will say, "Well, why do we have to come down and do this?" And you kind of talk about them or if they call and say, "We can't be there at 1:30, you know, it's just going to take us a little while." And we've done it. We used to do it out at training. We'd sit around and say, "Oh, they don't do anything but watching TV." And everybody will pick up, and play on that for a while. The only difference is that we don't do it 24-hours at a time because you have to go back to work. I know sometimes in *Operations*, a guy used to -- when I was in *Operations*, you could pick a little bitty deal, take one little project of a school visit and you could infect that boil just by picking at that one little bitty deal.

{Everyone talking at once}

**R:** Because you had the time to do it.

{A lot of people saying Um hmm}

**R:** Right. But the reason is, like Bob was saying over there --

Everyone talking}

: \_\_\_\_\_ out the window. You know?

: The thing is that when like in training is that you've got a scheduled activity you've been working on because you've been given this task to perform. And then, when you get it ready and it's done, and the time to call the troops down, that's where you get your attitudes. That's where you form your attitudes when they come out there with the attitude problems. Well then, you form your attitude, and you're going to talk about them.

**FACILITATOR:** Would you guys say that the workload in *Staff* is greater than the workload in *Operations*?

**R:** Yeah.

{Several people saying "Yeah"}

**R:** In my experience it is.

**R:** And more continuous.

**FACILITATOR:** That's pretty unanimous.

**R:** *Staff* does tremendously more than *Operations*.

R: That's another thing that we, like you say, that we have real jobs.

R: Right. {Laughter}

**FACILITATOR:** Let me ask you all. Let me back up real quick.

R: Take a *Staff* job, the 8-hour period. Take out your breaks. Take out your lunch, how many of those hours, --

R: You get breaks? {Laughter}

{Everyone talking}

R: How many of those minutes are filled with productive work time? And the same thing in *Operations*. Take the 24 hours of *Operations*, --

R: Take eight of it.

R: Take that time and add up how much time was really spent on runs; how much time was spent returning to an alarm, going to alarms; how much time was spent cleaning the station? How much time was spent on other activities that they did that day? And then, compare the two, and I think then you'll see where there's somewhat of a attitude I guess, that they do have a lot a time.

{Everyone talking}

R: The other thing that I think, and the longer you stay in *Staff*, the more you probably experience it, when you go on vacation or if you're sick or it's your day off, you're work is still there.

R: And it piles up.

R: And it piles up. When you're in *Operations*, when 12 o'clock rolls around, if you're on a call --

R: You're relieved on the spot.

R: That call doesn't pile up. And if you've got inspections to do, and you're the Lieutenant, you're going to be off the next shift, the driver steps up in the Lieutenant's position and it's his or her job to carry on and do what's required of the shift.

**FACILITATOR:** You have a point. Yeah. That is a good point.

**R:** To summarize what he's saying is that if you get a position open in *Staff*, you don't have a thousand people trying to get that position versus as you would in *Operations*. The thing that people say, "You ain't doing nothing." Well, they just tell a guy that come off the training, they would say, "Well, that gentlemen there today will trade you in the next five minutes, and we'll write the letter." "Oh, no, no." Well, the thing is what you're saying is not true. We don't have it as good you do and you know it.

**FACILITATOR:** So, I'm going to go back a minute to that rift that we were talking about, but since we're discussing this and what I'm hearing is either (a) that there is a consensus that people in *Operations* are lazy. They are lazy. Or, (b), there's just a consensus they don't have much work.

**R:** They're just not --

{Everyone talking}

**R:** They're not as busy, and that's the thing that I find baffling. When they, "they" meaning the people in *Operations*, when they're asked to do something a little bit extra like help with a task or event or maybe take on some more training, they'll say "We're busy."

**R:** Right. And then, the other avenue of that, too, when they get out there and they have a good time doing it, and they enjoy it. A lot of times they don't want to leave when it's time to leave. But when they come back, and then somebody'll say, "Why did I have to do that?" And so then, everybody jumps on that band wagon again. "And why did we have to do that event?" Or they come down to SOO with all training, and everybody that goes through that and thought it was the greatest thing since they have learned it for a while, the best training they've had or something. But they get back to the station, "Why did we have to go down to training to do SOO?" "Why did we have to go to Med Ops to do SOC or whatever?"

**R:** I think education is the key to helping to break that rift because I am being more aware of what's going on, and why it's happening. It helps me to understand it to looking at the big picture, and what really do the shops do? You can't tell them everything. You just can't, you know, what's happening at training? What all do they have going on and things like that? It may help to eliminate some of that.

**FACILITATOR:** So, your version of business and their version of business are two different things. Does that create in your minds animosity? In other words, do you resent the time that they have to do whatever they do, and you don't have that time?

**R:** I don't resent it but I do demand a little bit of respect for the effort and the time that I do put in. Because I am working a lot harder than I did when I was in *Operations*. I know that for a fact.

{Everybody talking at once}

**R:** I chose this position.

**R:** Yeah. So, I'm fine.

**R:** I chose it. I chose the workload.

**R:** I knew what was coming. There's no jealousy or anything between the two.

**R:** I resent them saying they're busy.

**R:** Yeah. That's for me. I chose to be here. I still choose to be here. I could go out. I have that choice, that's mine. But I choose to stay. But I do agree that when they have something to do, and they complain that they're overworked and too busy, and things like that. And then, that's where resentment comes from.

**R:** I don't think anybody resents the time. I think what happens is when you worked on a project, and you put in -- I know Pub Ed for this month alone has put in at least six months solid work towards that event, plus the other things. They have more. Training does things. Safety does things. Everybody in a *Staff* position, prevention puts in building certain things. And then, to hear the complaints, I think that's where it starts affecting you to where you kind of get disheartened because you put in a lot of time and effort, and a lot of respect issues.

**FACILITATOR:** The lack of respect issue.

**R:** The lack of respect issue.

**R:** That's why everybody needs to take a tour of *Staff*.

**FACILITATOR:** Does everybody in this room agree with that?

**R:** I do.

**R:** You bet.

**R:** Yes.

**FACILITATOR:** Because it's a perspective building event?

{Everybody talking at once}

R: Even if it's six months.

R: It expands your knowledge of the fire department.

**FACILITATOR:** So, is that what I'm hearing from the group -- correct me if I'm wrong? Back to the rift, I was kind of getting the sense from you guys that you don't really feel like it exists but that is because you have a different perspective. Is that correct or do you think it exist?

R: I don't think it exists because I have a different perspective.

R: I think a lot of people may just look at *Staff* from the point of view that they don't want to work it. If they're offered a promotion they may take it because they have to, to do their time, and get out.

R: I guarantee you that even those people that do that will come out with a better perspective of how this department is running whether they have a bad attitude of serving that job or not. They will because they'll be forced then to learn how the system works. They have to or they will be ate up in it. They have to learn how well they do in it. It's a different story.

**FACILITATOR:** Let me run this by you. I'm going to ask ya'll what your perception is of *Operations*. Do you perceive *Operations* personnel as perceiving that a rift exists?

R: I don't know.

**FACILITATOR:** Would you be surprised to learn that unanimously yesterday in the *Operations* focus group they agreed there was a rift between *Staff* and *Operations*?

R: I wouldn't be surprised.

**FACILITATOR:** Anybody else? It doesn't surprise you? Okay. Just so I can sum up on that particular issue. The consensus is that a rift is probably perceptual and based on a lack of education or experience. It's associated with a *Staff* assignment.

R: Simply because I don't know who was in your *Operations* group --

R: A bunch of Toms.

**R:** But did those Toms -- have those Toms ever served in a *Staff* position? And how can you speak of something that you do not know or have not been there. You have not walked in those shoes, you're only going on perceptions.

**FACILITATOR:** Which is all I was measuring. Do you perceive a rift between the two? And that's all they were speaking to.

**R:** I don't see any big rift. I see -- because rift would be construed as --

**FACILITATOR:** Negative energy, yeah. It's kind of a general --

**R:** There's times that when -- I guarantee if you were to split us up, and if we just take sides, this guy here he was having a fight with an *Operations* guy, and you're a *Staff* guy, *Staff* is going to back you, whereas *Operations* is going to back *Operations*. It's just two different type people that run the --

**FACILITATOR:** Go for it.

**R:** And another thing, too, might just be fear of the unknown. Those guys have no idea what it's like to be in a *Staff* job. I know I used to have to go over to Prevention or something, and look around the corner. I've never been down that hallway, and furthermore, I don't want to go down that hallway. So, I think that may be a reason why they perceive there's a rift. It's simply not knowing what's involved in *Operations*, and the *Staff* --

**:** Let me just add, it's amazing. When I first went down to *Staff* I had people asking me why did you come down because I volunteered. And when you're out at the fire stations they say, "When are you coming out? That's all they want to know, "When are you coming out?"

**I:** Yes.

**I:** Yes. I hear that all the time.

{Everybody talking}

**FACILITATOR:** In fact, when you meet with *Operations* people, do they generally ask you that question?

**R:** Yes. We hear that all the time.

**R:** That's the first question they ask.

**R:** How much time do you have?

**R:** They ask you when are you getting out?

**FACILITATOR:** As if it's a prison sentence or something.

**R:** That's what wrong with the perception of it.

**FACILITATOR:** Is there anybody in this room that feels like they're serving a prison sentence?

**R:** No. This is his first term.

**R:** No.

{Several people saying "No."}

**R:** I chose to be here.

**R:** In this room though you're kind of loaded because five of us chose it. And of course, one chose because of promotion.

**R:** Yeah. I chose to be on *Staff*, too.

**R:** Several of us have been in *Staff*.

**R:** That's to me a whole different issue, too. In my perception, I feel like there are more and more people in *Staff* now that chose to be than used to be.

**R:** Today you have a better *Staff* than you've ever had. I think you'd be surprised.

**R:** I agree I've seen a change over the last four years.

**R:** The attitude at prevention is a whole lot different than it used to be as far as your calendars and shrines.

**FACILITATOR:** Right. Come in. Come on in. Come in Bob.

**R:** Hello Bob.

**R:** Hi Bob.

**R:** Bob!

**FACILITATOR:** Hey did I give you guys the impression it was 1:30?

**R:** I had that impression.

**FACILITATOR:** My bad, I guess. Come on in and sit down. Everybody in here is Bob. Scoot on up to the table here.

**R:** Come on Bob. Sit by me.

**R:** Did we start at 1:00? I'm sorry.

**FACILITATOR:** Yeah. I think it must have been my error because you and the other Bob up there got here at the same time.

**R:** You're on a different time than the rest of us.

**R:** This is *Staff* time.

**R:** Bob time.

**R:** There's that rift between us and the rest of the fire department. That's another story.

**FACILITATOR:** Let me catch you up real quick. And then, we're fixing to move to a different topic. So, you'll be able to jump right on board. What we've been discussing is whether or not there exists the perception within the fire department that there is a rift or some negative energy that exists between *Operations* personnel and *Staff* personnel. And we've been wondering or discussing about our thoughts and feelings as to whether that really exists, and if so, why. And I was just expressing to this group that the *Operations* focus group unanimously agreed that there is the perception of a rift or some negative energy there. This group was just discussing that. But I'm going to move into a different topic real quick, and it's indirectly related to this. This organization has lots of different stated goals. And of course, you guys that have answered my question never saw that there was a spot for rank, order and goals. What I would like to ask is, do you believe that there is a difference between how *Staff* perceives the organizational goals of this organization to be, and what *Operations* perceives the organizational goals to be? In other words, do you think that they are working at cross purposes? That they believe the number one goal is different from what you might believe it to be?

**R:** Yes.

**R:** I think that's true.

{Several people saying "Yes"}

**R:** Their number one goal is suppression.



R: I would say no.

**FACILITATOR:** What do you think?

R: Everybody should be on the same page as far as what are we saying.

R: We should be but --

R: As we're saying as a department, and what's going out to department- wide, what is our primary mission? We just had our goals. The Strategic Reaction Plan just went out. There is a section in there that's on the top that says what is our primary -- ?

R: It's not perceived by everybody that see it.

**FACILITATOR:** The espoused goal by the administration. Does everybody in this room agree with that espoused goal? I haven't seen it, so I don't know what it is.

R: Yeah. Yeah.

R: The mission is to preserve life and safety.

R: And emergency prevention with *Operations* as a back up, but those guys don't want to be considered as back up, because in their mind suppression is number one and everything else is --

**FACILITATOR:** They characterize themselves as the tip of the spear. Would you guys characterize them as the tip of the spear or would you say *Staff* is the tip of the spear?

R: We understand we are the ones supporting them.

{Everyone talking at one}

R: We're the rods.

R: Yeah. We're the rods. We're the rods.

R: On an arrow we're the feathers at the end, so they're the head of the arrow.  
{Laughter}

**FACILITATOR:** Okay.

R: If we're doing our job right that arrow will fly straight.

{Everyone talking}

**FACILITATOR:** Say that again so that I can get that.

**R:** If you're looking at an arrow, and you've got the point of the arrow, and then the feathers on the back, and I forgot what they're called, but the *Staff* is like the feathers.

**R:** The fletchers.

**R:** The fletchers. It keeps your arrow flying straight. And if *Staff* is doing the job that it's supposed to do whether it be training or medical *Operations* support or public education, safety, if we do all of that right, that arrow flies straight.

**FACILITATOR:** Could *Operations* survive without *Staff*?

**R:** I don't think *Operations* could.

**R:** No.

{Everyone talking}

**R:** I think it would be harder to survive. Yeah, they could survive. But if you pull all the fletchings off, the arrow is still going to fly but it may wobble.

**R:** When that fire truck goes out, it's going out in a reactionary mode, 100%. It's reaction.

**F:** And most of the *Staff* is proactive.

**F:** Yes. And the idea of prevention, the idea of training, the idea of public education, the idea of maintenance and upkeep is proactive so that the reactionary measures can occur.

**R:** But his question was at first was the perception is their goals --

**FACILITATOR:** Perception of goals.

**R:** Their goals are different than our goals. My goal is to make sure that their vehicles are running. My goal is to perceive the support the *Operations* function on whatever, the feathers you call it. You know. But we perceive different.

**R:** The number one goal may not be different. It may be different when you get down further along. The number one goal for both sides is probably close to the same.

R: Well it might be.

R: It's kind of we're approaching it, though.

R: The line up behind.

R: They're approaching it from the reaction standpoint, and that's all they see. Where we're looking at it from the proactive, prevention standpoint. And so, those two things are at odds.

R: That point may be the same thing, but everybody has their different --

**FACILITATOR:** In your perception, do you think *Operations* people respect that role that you play, the prevention?

R: There are some.

R: I think that's individual action.

**FACILITATOR:** Well, we'll speak in generalities. I mean we're obviously, you know --

R: I do not think the majority respect the position or the support.

**FACILITATOR:** The support -- I think I heard "proactive" a couple of times characterized with *Staff*. I heard "reactive" characterized with *Operations*. Do you think they respect the proactive side of what this department does? We were discussing earlier, you said, you don't even think they understand it.

R: They don't understand it. I can tell you that. {Several people agreeing}

R: They can't appreciate it if they don't understand it.

R: I think there are some that do. More people have served either in *Staff* or they have some background to understand it.

R: The ones that have never served *Staff* do not understand it.

R: Yeah. I'm not going to say all. I'm not going to --

{Everyone talking at once}

R: I can give you percentage. I can tell you percentage.

R: I can think of names of people that have a great attitude. {Everyone talking at once} They know their mission. They know their jobs. They understand.

R: And they are appreciative.

R: Yeah. And here again I think sometimes we focus on the complainers.

R: The negative. {Several people saying "Um hmm"}

**FACILITATOR:** Well, that's an interesting point because I have seen exactly that from a *Staff* perspective. You get that one complaining group, and you generalize from that one event like we said before, and you associate that with everybody.

R: That's because the complaining group gives you such a heartache that you are spending so much energy trying to please them.

{Everyone talking}

**FACILITATOR:** Back to the goal thing then. Do you believe that *Operations* and *Staff* have different perceptions of the goals of this organization?

R: Yes.

R: Yes.

**FACILITATOR:** Is that a consensus? I think you said no. {Directed at one respondent}

R: I'd have to go with Bob. I think we all agree on the goal but we disagree on how we approach it, and what is our mechanism to accomplish that. Bob looks at a prevention standpoint. Bob looks at a let's get the apparatus, keep them running standpoint. And making sure that the prevention message and the safety message get there. And our guys aren't integrating all that together. They're saying "I want to make sure my big red truck with all the toys gets there when somebody calls with a problem." Yeah. That's what we're moving towards.

R: And the reason why I say yes is because we hear the argument over and over again that because I'm — what happens if I'm over here at this elementary school doing a Pub Ed function, and grandma next door to the fire station dies. So, that's why I say yes to the idea that they have a different concept of the goals of the fire department than the espoused goals of the fire department.

**FACILITATOR:** Would it change the perception of this group at all if I told you that the *Operations* folk unanimously thought that there was cross purposes of goals in the department between *Staff* and *Operations*?

R: They thought that there were two different goals?

**FACILITATOR:** They thought that. Yeah.

R: It wouldn't surprise me.

**FACILITATOR:** -- that *Operations* and *Staff* were working at cross purposes.

R: Did they think their goal was suppressions?

**FACILITATOR:** We didn't actually talk about specific goals but there was definitely a consensus that there was incompatible goals between *Staff* and *Operations*.

R: I can see that because we have conflicts. The training division may say let's go do this. Prevention says but you've got to go and do inspections. Med Ops says, "No, you need to get ready for your EMT exam." And they're sitting out there at the station wondering, "Okay, who is the priority?"

F: That is where the rift comes right there. There is never a rift, to me, until they are told that they need to be somewhere and do something outside their realm. It always is. I guarantee you most of them will be complaining because they've got to go to Med Ops to do their CE hours. They've got to come to training and do this. I guarantee they get real upset when they have to come to the shop and go into reserve. They don't like it. That's where the rift, to me, comes. You know. All the other times they don't care.

R: Yeah. There's no rift if they get to sit at the station.

R: Don't mess with me.

{Everyone talking}

R: Don't leave out inspections. Don't leave that out of there.

R: Well, inspections. I understand why they can. Yeah. Exactly, when it comes to inspections, I guarantee you. That's where your rift comes in.

R: Because they're looking at their perspectives.

R: And they're own --

R: Yeah, but they can't see that. They're looking at their --

R: Their world revolves around the fire station.

**FACILITATOR:** So, what I'm hearing then is that this group agrees that *Operations* has a limited perspective.

**R:** Oh yeah.

**FACILITATOR:** On what is or should be important to the department, can I finish the statement by saying that?

**R:** Um hmm. {Several people agreeing}

**R:** And I think we encourage that sometimes because there's not a lot of communication. I don't know when they've been assigned to a Pub Ed function. When I call them up and say, "Hey man, I need you down here for your shop." Or, "We've got to be at the shops to get a tire changed." And they perceive that as "Boy, those guys don't have a clue what they're doing up there."

**R:** I think the fire department is trying to address that with the intranet. Granted it will take some time to get all that up. But I think there are things they are trying to do.

{If anyone talking}

**R** -- where *Staff* is available to get on that. Right now you try to go through shift commanders, but they have the same kind of problems. A shift commander deals with 6 BCs trying to make sure who's doing what. I know when I was in *Operations* we didn't always call the Chief. The shift before said we plan to go do inspections.

**R:** Hey, Bob. {Severally saying, "Hey, Bob"}

**R:** -- came by about one 'clock and said, "We're going to go do inspections. Is that okay?"

**FACILITATOR:** Right.

**R:** So, I'm sure it's like having 36 companies with 35 different units out there.

**FACILITATOR:** Right. Let me catch Bob up. Everybody in here is Bob. We're taping this. What we're discussing, and I apologize if the error was mine.

**R:** Let me apologize.

**FACILITATOR:** That's okay. We'll rock along. We're discussing the dynamics between the relationship between *Staff* and *Operations*. We have been discussing

specifically whether or not we believe there are or feel there is a perception of a rift there or conflict. We've moved through that. We've discussed goal compatibility issues between the two. And I was just fixing to go to something else. So, this is perfect timing. Feast your eyes up here if you all can.

R: Can I tell a joke?

**FACILITATOR:** Sure, Bob.

R: What do you call a bunch of firemen in a basement? A wine seller. {Laughter}

R: That answers some of the other questions that we had earlier.

**FACILITATOR:** Would you say *Operations* firefighters are in that basement or *Staff*?

R: I said firefighters. I didn't know there was a difference between *Operations* and *Staff*.

**FACILITATOR:** Well, okay. With that as a segue, we're going to talk about being "in the loop." "In the loop," we've all got different ideas of what that means. We've all heard it spoken colloquially, and that means different things to different people. But for the purpose of the ensuing discussion, "in the loop" I want to mean (1) access to information, information that is important on the direction or on programs and things that are going on, decisions that are being made in this department. (2) Involvement in programs, project decisions that affect the direction of this organization. (3) Multiple work related links. Let me explain that. Work related links are like interaction that you have with other sections, divisions, and bureaus within this organization by virtue of your position. For example, Bob probably has lots of interaction with headquarters; *Operations* personnel because of central site training; training because of your role in that. So, he has several work related links by virtue of his position. Everybody got a feel for what I mean by that? (4) Access to people in positions of power and authority or influence. Okay. These are the four criteria for the purpose of this discussion. I want to be in the loop with that in mind. In your opinion, is *Operations* more "in the loop," or is *Staff* more "in the loop" in this organization?

R: *Staff*.

R: I'd have to say *Staff*.

R: By far.

- R: Because we have to contact. Even though, we don't do it real well. We still have to coordinate and communicate. Bob's got something I need, or I've got to do a project that involves using some of Bob's equipment. Those kinds of things.
- R: That's where we talk about learning the system. You know, you have to learn who does what. Who you want to go through. You can learn to cut your own red tape out. You know who to access, to go to get what you need.
- R: And I know I've been *Ops, Staffs, Ops, Staff*. And once you step back out, you start losing perspective, in my mind, of really what's going on. Once you -- I think you've been in and out. You step out of that loop somewhat and you become blinders on, and your world is your station. Oh, you've got to go downtown maybe or something like that but --

**FACILITATOR:** So, what I'm hearing is that *Staff*, at least from the two perspectives here "is" the loop. Is that right? I mean that's --

- R: It's a part of the loop.

F: Because our programs are, I think, wider ranging and involve more divisions than simply calling up, and getting a mechanic to come out, and work on your vehicle. That's a single contact that at one number run. We're working at, you know, the supervisors of those people are working with people to make the decisions to send entire battalions down to us or give us resources that we can --

F: Also, have link :

F: -- stuff I hear in *Staff*.

R: Also, I think *Staff* could be considered like maybe the hub. Not necessarily the hub of the department, but in this loop it's kind of the hub. It's just an concentric circle. When Med Ops is going to do something everybody is kind of informed. So, they're training those. Okay, we were going to have this but Med Ops needs to have the central site delivery by a certain date. So, we've got to stick the training in after that. Pub Ed's got a big event in October or they've got a big event in June. Within *Staff* there's a lot more communications, especially through the assistant chiefs. Everything is communicated probably on a weekly basis. Whereas, I think when you get out in *Operations* if it doesn't directly affect your unit you may not hear about it right away. It may be two weeks later when it's filtered down to your unit that you're going to a central site delivery for a training purpose or a Med Ops purpose or you're going to a school. We've known about it for several weeks.

R: To me, in their mind, okay, they've got over to the school to visit. They don't know it's them and the school. They don't know that big picture that there are 75



schools plus other things. Plus to do that, Med Ops has been contacted. Training has been contacted. Haz-Mat's been contacted to see about calendar clearing, coordinating between battalions, command *Staff* meetings, things like that. They don't see that stuff. They don't know it. They think they're going to go over to their unit for that school in that loop.

R: Being in *Staff* gives you an easier access to the loop, but looking at your definition up there I think anybody that wants to can be in the loop.

R: I think being in *Staff* gives you easy access because you're here four or five days a week. It's easy to stay up on what's going on. You hear the grapevine four or five days a week.

**FACILITATOR:** Let's talk about what Bob just said. Access to information involvement in programs, projects, and multiple work related links and access to people in position of power and authority. Do you all agree with Bob that people in *Operations* if they want to they could be in that loop?

R: Yes. A hundred percent. A hundred percent. {Some saying, "Yes"} I personally would love to have help.

: It takes a little bit more effort on their part than it does in *Staff*.

: But it can be done.

Sure. Sure it can.

**FACILITATOR:** What about you, Bob. What do you think?

R: I think it's a mind set. My seven year old son thinks that hamburgers come from or crackers come from the shelf, and my eight year old thinks they come from HEB. And my wife and I know that they're grown in every weed that's planted in Kansas. Firemen think that their paychecks come admin where people in *Staff* are constantly exposed to intricacies of what happens to -- you know -- fire trucks don't come from Bob. Fire trucks come from -- there's a lot of stuff that --

**FACILITATOR:** Huge processes.

R: And we're exposed to the intricacies of what it takes to operate an organization of a thousand people who has a \$70 million budget. So, it's not access to information, in my opinion, as it is exposure. I think if I held a bow and arrow with one of those rubber dots to my son's forehead, and ask him where hamburger really came from he could probably come up with a cow. I'm sorry I'm using this analogy.

**FACILITATOR:** No. We -- so, what you're saying then is you're agreeing, I guess, with them. If they wanted to be in the loop, they could.

**R:** It's a mindset.

**R:** It takes extra thinking. It takes extra effort.

**R:** They've got to take those blinders off. It's there for them.

**R:** They can certainly reach up and pull the blinders away if they want to. If they want to come "in the loop" and they want to see the intricacies of how the department works in a bigger picture there's no secrets. And personally I'm always asking for volunteers and help with my particular roles that I would need assistance with. That would also allow them some of that --

**FACILITATOR:** Access to the loop.

**R:** That's why the conflict they see with *Staff* is because Bob said their lives revolves around the fire station, period. And then, when you have somebody to try to get them involved, and they don't want to take those blinders off that's when the conflict comes. It's always when they're asked to do something it causes a conflict.

**FACILITATOR:** Do you all think they don't want in the loop?

I don't know if it's that they don't want in the loop. I think a lot of people would like to be in the loop. But when you're out at your station and you may be the only one on that's out there or there may be a couple of you out there that want to be in the loop. A lot of it's going to be driven, of course, by the company officer and or the company specialist, and then the others. But if you want to get into it, people are calling and making arrangements. I know companies that will go down and train on their own. And other companies that won't leave the station unless they have to get in their 20 inspections by the end of October, or they have to get in their 20 CE hours, or something like that, then they'll leave the station. Otherwise, they'd be happy to stay there. Their central area is whatever revolves around that station or making calls. We have to go to our captain schools, so it revolves around three or four stations.

**R:** Well, their access is limited to what they can perceive.

**FACILITATOR:** Well, let me ask you this. I want to get everybody in this room -- .

{Everyone talking at once}

**R:** -- anybody can call anybody.

R: Yeah. But what I'm saying is -- .

**FACILITATOR:** Do you all feel comfortable picking up the phone and calling the assistant chief?

R: Um hmm.

R: Yeah.

R: Sure.

**FACILITATOR:** Everybody agree with that?

R: Yes.

**FACILITATOR:** Do you think people in *Operations* feel comfortable picking up the phone and calling the assistant chief?

I : No.

: Well, as a general rule, no.

: They're breaching the chain of command for one thing.

**FACILITATOR:** So, why are people in *Staff* not breaching the chain of command, people in *Operations* are?

I I think it's because on a day-to-day basis you work with your assistant chief or your chief.

**FACILITATOR:** People in *Staff* you mean?

R: *Staff* people -- on a day to day basis more closely.

**FACILITATOR:** So, what that suggests to me is that *Staff* is much greater in the loop.

R: Um hmm.

**FACILITATOR:** But *Operations*, you all have said, could be in it, but they would break the chain of command.

R: The most thing I was trying to say is if they want to be informed, and I think most *Operations* people want to know what's going on, but how they get that information is --

R: And I think maybe they don't know which way to go to get the information.

R: Or which way to go to be in the loop.

R: They're not exposed.

R: And here again because -- right, because they don't know which -- when they pick up that phone which person to call or which -- to get the information.

R: Instead of calling the assistant chief, they're going to call, they're going to call their union vice president. {Laughter}

R: Well, and some of them may not even want to know, and it may not be real important. They want to know what is that phone number that I can call to get this piece of equipment. Not that it's on a backorder or I have to get three bids, and you know, it takes me six weeks to get it. They don't care about that, and it's not real pertinent to their job. It would be nice if they understood why I have to say, "Well, it's going to be a while before we can get it." But they want an instant gratification.

R: That's where the conflict comes from us to them. They call us, we tell them what the process is, and they get all upset.

**FACILITATOR:** Is it important that they know what the bid process is for a new fire truck?

R: Um hmm

**FACILITATOR:** Why you have that feature?

R: They should. They would appreciate it more.

R: Maybe it's more important for them to know that there is a bid process rather than what the process is.

**FACILITATOR:** Okay. So, to sum up on this, what is the consensus in the room? Who has greater -- who is in the loop to a greater extent? *Staff of Operations*?

R: I think *Staff*.

R: *Staff* is in the loop.

**FACILITATOR:** Guys?

**R:** Yes. *Staff*.

**FACILITATOR:** Okay. Let's move on to another one. Then I've got to let you guys go here pretty quick. Would everybody agree that over the past few years we've seen some major and dramatic changes in this department?

**R:** Yes.

**R:** Yes.

**FACILITATOR:** I think that probably one of them that has received the greatest attention, and certainly the greatest negative attention has been the new hiring process. It's been hotly debated out at all the fire houses. And I presume it's been hotly debated in *Staff* offices as well. What I would like to know individually and collectively from this group is, what do you think of the hiring process in general? How do you perceive it will affect the fire department now and in the future? Good? Bad? Neutral? Is the jury still out?

**R:** I don't -- I hadn't given it a lot of thought personally, because I don't have a lot of time to give it a lot of debate or time or energy. I don't have it. But what I do know is that we had previously looked at one focal point, and that certainly doesn't necessarily bring in the smartest or brightest or the best firefighters, because we all know that it takes more than the skills to take an exam to be a firefighter. We also, I think, I know personally, I have a problem also with the promotional exam for the same reason. It looks at one thing. It does that simply out of fairness that there can be no bias. But that does not necessarily promote your better firefighters to the ranks that they should be in.

**FACILITATOR:** So, you think it's a good thing? Or --

**R:** I think it's a step in some direction. I don't know that it's the right direction or not, because I think we need to evaluate it and see what is -- what are we bringing in? What are these people like that we're bringing in? I don't know. I do not know that.

**R:** Well, let me chime in here since I'm over training. The process we had brought in very good people. Now, I don't care what process you have, you're going to have some people that shouldn't be in this job and they will get through, because of the political clout, or your hands are tied in getting rid of that person. But the process we had wasn't a bad process. It might have -- the test you stay focused one thing, but inside the test was four or five things. There was math. There's comprehension. There was other different things that you have in that one test.

What can -- you know, you say the one focal point. But I'm sorry, but the B-pad, to me, is more of one focal point that they're going in that's weighing too heavy, because it's a judgment on somebody watching somebody react to something, and that's silly to put that much weight on something like that.

**FACILITATOR:** So, the argument that you're saying, and I've heard before, is that when you introduce subjectivity into it, where does it stop?

**R:** I'm not against the process. The process -- having a process to hire people is fine with me. I'm not totally against having a different type of process to get people there, but there should be a place where a ranking, whether it be by test, or -- the way they've got it weighted is one person can do good physical, one person can ace that test. And if he doesn't do well on the B-pad, that person doesn't make it up the way. It's already proven on the list that we have.

**FACILITATOR:** What does everybody else think of the hiring process? Is it going to be a good thing for us? Is it --

**R:** I don't know enough about it.

**l:** I don't either.

**l:** I don't know.

**l:** I think I kind of have to go with Bob that we need to see the results. Let's see how these people compare to the past groups. We know the makeup is considerably different than what we're used to dealing with. But is the end result okay given the new hiring process? Are we still going to have good firefighters coming out? We evaluated them on the test taking skills when they came in, and the \_\_\_\_\_ method. And we also use six months of training to help get that and weed out some of those characteristics that weren't desired.

**R:** I agree with that. I think there might be a jury still out. I have had the opportunity to work with these cadets and will continue during this class. And the make up of the class is different, but as you're teaching them it's no different than the past classes that I had the opportunity to work with. You've got some outstanding people in the class. You've got some people that you wonder how they got this far in the process. And that's going to be that way no matter what happens. And there are people in there that are very sharp. And there are people in there that really want the job, and that's what we've always had in the process. So, I'm curious to see how the overall grading mechanism will come out, how they'll do through the whole cadet class, through their State certification process, and in the fire stations. The juries won't be out for maybe probably three years.

R: You've got to remember that the last class before them was the highest average that the State of Texas ever had. Not too many people know that, because they didn't want to advertise that.

**FACILITATOR:** On the different processes?

R: Yeah.

{Several talking}

R: The cadet class has the highest state average on the written exam than ever, but that's not advertised. To me this process wants to be more political than, you know --

R: Certainly, I don't think there's anybody that's saying that that's not.

R: That's what I don't like about the process. I don't think that's getting the best firefighter when you try to make it political. You know, if you want to make it the best rounded, fine. Have your process. I'm for that. Take away the single test. Get it out of there and put up \_\_\_\_\_. Firefighter \_\_\_\_\_.

**FACILITATOR:** What about you guys down there? Any thoughts?

R: There's three things. First of all, the people that we choose to be fire fighters, what we're saying is we've chosen you to inherit our profession. And that's a hell of a thing to say to somebody. USA Today reported that in a poll that they had that 78% of the people that they polled, the fire department was the most trusted organization. They had the greatest trust in that organization than any other. No other organization listed in the poll came close to that. No other organization even had half of that sort of group. And I think what that says is whatever we're doing, either it gets the job we're doing or the people that are doing the job out on the ledge. But there's something that we're doing very, very well. And so, I think there's a lot that can be said about it. So, I think that people aren't just complaining. We're saying something and we're talking about the people that we hire. We've gotten the best in this job. The third thing I would have to say is that there is sparse interaction like that just for that class.

R: I think that the hiring process has always been evolutionary, and will always tend to be. It's always changing looking for the right combination of things to pick the right people for the job. But in this particular hiring process, they have established some prerequisites that they have to meet before they can even get into the process and take the B-pad test or any of the other tests. And I think that old Bob over there hit on a point a minute ago that when we're doing that B-pad process we are actually looking at who we want to have in our career field.

**FACILITATOR:** So, the general sense I'm getting from this group is that the jury is out. It could be a good thing, but I definitely don't hear with the exception of him that maybe it's a bad thing.

**R:** I'm not saying it's a bad thing. I'm just saying that having a process is all right. I'm not against that. I think some of the process they have done are pretty good. I'm saying that one process that they have is weighing too heavily on him. That's what I am saying.

**FACILITATOR:** With that being said, and those opinions being expressed and remembering the intent of this particular research, how does this group believe the *Operations* level focus group responded to that question?

**R:** I don't know.

**FACILITATOR:** What do you think?

**R:** I believe they overall approved of it.

**FACILITATOR:** You think they approved of it?

**R:** Um, hmmm.

**FACILITATOR:** Who hasn't discussed it?

**R:** I would think that in general, they're going to disagree with it.

**R:** I think they would disagree.

**FACILITATOR:** Any reason why you guys think that? Why do you think they agreed with it? Because you're the only voice that said that?

**R:** Well, Bob, that's because I have my finger on the pulse. Actually, it's carotid artery.

**R:** He's in the loop. {Laughter}

**FACILITATOR:** But everybody else thinks that they probably were against it?

**R:** I don't know.

**FACILITATOR:** You don't know.

**R:** It's hard to say because when you're hearing grapevines, you're going to hear the negatives.



***FACILITATOR:*** That's it. That's all I had.

**R:** What was the other question?

***FACILITATOR:*** I'm not going to tell you.

**R:** Well, you've told us everything else.

**R:** Yeah, you told us the other ones.

***FACILITATOR:*** Okay. I'll tell you off the record.

{End}

## **Appendix C**

## FOCUS GROUP - OPERATIONS

**FACILITATOR:** To get you guys kind of up-to-speed on what I'm studying and why we're here, did anybody get one of my questionnaires? That's actually a good thing. I sent out 100 random questionnaires - 50 to *Staff* people and 50 to *Operations*. I selected them randomly on a database down at Sid's office. So, it's probably a good thing that you didn't get one of them, because then you don't have any preconceived notions on what it is that I'm exploring here. But, so you will know in general what I'm looking into, it's group relations within organizational settings. That's in general. Specifically, what I'm investigating is the dynamics between the relationship between *Operations* and *Staff* in fire service organizations, particularly in the Austin Fire Department, because this is my population group where I'm doing my actual research. This is called field research in the academic vernacular. Why am I studying this? Well, in my experiences over my career as I have moved from an *Operations* assignment to a *Staff* assignment, and then back, and then back to *Staff* for special assignments and stuff, I have noticed even as an observing participant, there seems to be this strange energy that exists between these two functional organizational groups, *Operations* and *Staff*. Of course, we're all *Operations* here, right, at this time in our career. And I've noticed that the old saw of, "Where you stand depends upon where you sit" definitely seems to be operative between these two functional groups on how they perceive people who are in the other group, or how they perceived organizational events, department decisions that are made, or levels of involvement. In fact, right before we started on this, I was sitting down talking to a *Staff* officer. He was talking about how many hours he works a day, and the things that he has to do in his typical day. Just for kicks and grins, I said, "Do you think there are people out in *Operations* who appreciate that?" He said, "Hell, no. They don't appreciate it" So, there's this negative energy that I think is a chasm or schism that exists between the two functional groups. That is the proposition, or the assumption that is driving the research, the exploration. Does that really exist? Is it really out there? I don't know. That's the first thing I want to talk about today. And I'm not saying that it does. What I would like to do is see if you believe or you have had any experiences, or you can share any anecdotes or any thoughts or feelings that would suggest that it does exist, or in your opinion, that it doesn't. If you do think that the negative energy is there, why do you think it is there? If you don't think it's there, tell me why you don't think it's there. Because I definitely have heard, in my *Staff* experience, I've heard *Staff* people refer to *Operations* as lazy; as not recognizing what is necessary to make an organization run. And I've heard *Operations* guys referring to *Staff* guys as being elitists. "They don't care what we think. They don't give a shit what we think out here. Our opinions just don't matter." So, as the first area of discussion, what do ya'll think about that?

**R:** I'm going to agree the chasm does exist. But in my time with the department, I think it narrowed some what. In my view, the chasm was the difference in when

we came in, we were young -- a pretty young group, 13 years ago. And the *Staff* people were real close to retiring. Really, we're looking at that and not so much the direction the department was taking. But now, as we get younger and younger guys on the *Staff*, the Chief, who has got 13 or 15 years of seniority in the Chief's position. You have got captains with 10, 12, 13 years who have been chiefs before then. As they get into the *Staff*, I think they're going to be more attuned to the energy level of those *Operations* people who were a young group of guys. I think the complaints we get are that guys in *Operations* have plenty of time to sit around. And *Staff* assigned fellows do have assignments and do have things they need to do. But like at EMS, you are going to be a seamless interaction between the two agencies. We need to get that seamless interaction between *Staff* and *Operations*. I mean, the big thing in this department is a lack of leadership.

**FACILITATOR:** So, you think the chasm exists because of lack of leadership?

**R:** A lack of effective leadership and cooperation with leadership and cooperation within the leadership.

**FACILITATOR:** Let me catch up our most recent participant here. We're taping, so we're not using names.

**R:** I spent 25 minutes at Ben White and IH-35. I apologize.

**FACILITATOR:** That's okay. What we're discussing right now is whether or not in y'all's opinion a chasm exists between *Staff* and *Operations*. You missed the preamble up to that. But we're just exploring individually and collectively whether or not the members in this group think there is a negative energy that separates the perceptions of people who are assigned to *Staff* and those who are assigned to *Operations*. And has this created some type of a chasm that could be dysfunctional, or not. That's something else that needs to be explored. He was just suggesting that in his opinion there is a chasm. He thinks it's becoming less.

**R:** Yeah. I don't think it's that Grand Canyon type sized. I think it's, over the years, as the department gets more progressive and gets younger people in there and younger people out in the field who are more open to suggestions, then people in the *Staff* positions aren't looking at retirement at how they can better their own career. The problems that I saw initially in the first couple of years aren't really there anymore. There are still problems, but an attitude change depends a lot on who they put upstairs. That's one of the big things of an operation, no matter what kind chief you're going to be. You can be one that's kind of tantamount to City Manager, politics, or who would really be concerned with what we need to do out here in the field in order to be able to be more effective; to get the kind of equipment we need; listen to our complaints about territories and other things. Things that are issues to us in *Operations*.

**FACILITATOR:** So, maybe -- well, does anybody else have any thoughts?

**R:** Yeah, I've got some thoughts. I tend to agree with you, but I think as much a factor in this is the evolution of our job as firefighters in the field. Before, I think, and even now to a large extent, the job was to fight fires and make our medical calls. But now we have lot's of other tasks and assignments being pushed on us. The more you buy into that is a part of our job, then the more you need *Staff* people to get a good program up and going. Make it efficient. Work with your scheduling and all of this. But if you don't buy into that's part of our job, then it's just extraneous. You don't have any use for it. And I still think that exists. Not as bad as it did --

**FACILITATOR:** The chasm exists because you don't think people in *Operations* understand why some of the things are pushed down on them?

**R:** They don't understand, and they don't really feel we have a need for it.

**FACILITATOR:** What are some examples?

**R:** Well, let's say the public education section. You know, you have three people all who would say we did fine 10 years ago. And some people ask, "Why do we even have that?" (And it works backwards, too, because we only have one who doesn't have time for all the existing pubed activities.) I think that's not being positive. I don't think that's a positive thing for our department. I don't think it's a good way to go. But I do think it still exists.

**FACILITATOR:** Um hmm.

**R:** I think TQM is a big distracter, too. They push that on us and say, "This is going to be a way we should go. These are your mandatory skills and abilities." It has some good things I saw in there because it brought us as operational people there, the *Staff* people and we all should have had the same say in what goes on. I think that might have created the rift because TQM gave us that power to come in there and say, "Hey, we need a new truck company at this station." Little things that we think are assertive customer service and being efficient and being on the edge. Knowing what's going on and being prepared to do it.

**FACILITATOR:** Let me interrupt for just a second. You're talking about, both of you guys, you have initiatives that are given to *Operations* people. Public education, total quality management. I can think of a half a dozen other things like inspections and pre-fire plans. And you name it. Every time we turn around, it seems like there's another --

**R:** And here comes the fitness initiative.

**FACILITATOR:** Right. Exactly. CE training, etc. Do you guys think that poses a lack of respect for what it is you need to be concentrating on in the field? (I.E., are they really thinking about your interests when they make decisions to begin these new initiatives?) Or is that a problem at all?

**R:** I think a lot of the new initiatives are in fact good for us, but it needs to be done relatively. Like I enjoy all the Medical Ops training. Seven out of 10 calls I make, it's some type of medical problem. And I also am a firm believer in the fact that public education and prevention, so to speak, is our primary mission. I have given more tours to --

**FACILITATOR:** Does everybody agree with this?

**R:** Oh, yes. (Several people)

**R:** -- school kids. I've given more tours to school kids and shown kids around the engine than I have fought fires, period. And I think that pretty much goes -- I think the big chasm exists because of what I consider to be the perception of the troops on either side. You ask a combat engine company guy what a person in prevention does, and he will say, "He doesn't do Jack. He doesn't do nothing." You go to the same guy he's talking about and say, "What do they do out there?" "I don't know. They watch TV."

**FACILITATOR:** Watching football.

**R:** Yeah. And you ask them --

**R:** The perception is when you ask somebody in the *Operations* group, "What do you think of *Staff*?" The first thing they think of is the department in *Staff's* side that they haven't gotten any help from, or they know someone is not doing a damn thing. They don't think about the other section that they've gotten a lot of help from. You know, and the same thing with *Staff*. You know, they think of a slow company where they don't do anything.

**R:** Well, you know, what I think of when I think of *Staff*? Those guys are making \$300 more a month. {Laughter} That's the first thing that comes into my mind. But, you know, hey, that's a trade off.

**R:** I also think it is for them, because I don't want that job.

**R:** Well, that's the thing. They're still complaining about it.

**R:** Well, you know, that's -- it's real.

**R:** I've always tried to avoid *Staff*. At this point in my career I wish I hadn't. I know it's easy to say, but it looks like most of the players down there now are people that want to be there, other than the new lieutenants going to Med Ops or prevention. But just this whole fire service in general is going through such a big change as we slowly implement these new programs, I think most people are buying into it. We're not going to save kids by putting their house out when it's already on fire. And everybody is buying into that stuff. I just think the implementation of the programs is what we fine tune. Not, the programs themselves, but how they're interacting with *Operations* with the resource to do these programs. Same as they support us.

**R:** What Tom is saying there is that people going into *Staff* now, it's a different caliber of person. You have got to have a very academically inclined and a very organized person, different than an *Operations* type fire fighter.

**R:** A lot of people who are there want to be there.

**R:** Right.

**R:** They can operate on commitment because it's a different environment. It's like a 180 degree turn from what they're used to doing. And for most people now assigned to *Staff*, these are the *Operations* people who are sitting out there bitching about *Staff*, steadily finding themselves in *Staff* having to learn the job they really don't want. Working with civilians or other people who will either like it in *Staff*, or are professional in *Staff*, or civilians who would say, "Here comes another new lieutenant that I'm going to have to train in this position, because the last one just went back out to *Operations*."

**R:** A 24-year captain, unnamed, just told me the other day, "You know, if you went to anybody in the general public and said, 'I'm going to pay you \$30,000 to \$40,000 to drive all over the city to make sure that they are fire safe, (i.e., doing the building inspections).'" They would think it would be the greatest job in the world. You drag some driver who is making a promotion list down in prevention, and he's going to go kicking and screaming, just "Oh, Wa Wa Wa!" It's all a perception.

**R:** So, get guys out a chance that don't never do nothing. {Several people talking}

**R:** I'm sorry.

**FACILITATOR:** No, no. Good point.

**R:** Something he said, and something I'm hearing here does make me think again that I think part of the problem is we haven't done a very good job of reaching an agreement about what our primary mission is. You said a moment ago that you

thought it was prevention and public education. I think there's a strong belief that that's true in the fire service. I think there's also -- it may seem like a fine difference, but I think a lot of the fire service believes that it is a mitigation and medical mission. And they get off on these rabbit trails thinking rather that public education is the same thing, and it's not. I think though, as an organization, we ought to be open to an agreement on what our primary mission is and then stand back and figure out how are we going to accomplish it and what's the most effective way to do this.

**FACILITATOR:** Just a sec. Since you mentioned that, do you guys think that there is agreement within this organization as to what the primary mission is?

**R:** {several people} Heck no. We don't have any consensus like that.

**FACILITATOR:** You think that's --

**R:** There's no --

**FACILITATOR:** -- that's there's a line along the *Staff/Operations* boundary? Or do you think it's just a free-for-all no matter where you are assigned?

**R:** Well, it's just like Tom -- {Several people talking}. Well, it was just like a particular individual sweating in here, was that TQM gave the troops say-so. But who finally makes the executive decision about what's going to affect the entire department, whether it's *Operations*, whether it's administration? No matter what division it is, the last guys that are going to know are in *Operations*, because they're the --

**FACILITATOR:** Do we have a tendency, "we" is the *Operations* personnel, to associate everybody in *Staff* with the edicts from the "executive staff."

**R:** Yes.

**R:** Yeah.

**R:** Yes.

**R:** Well, I think -- yeah, it was on the personal point of view.

**R:** You have extremes out there. You have extremist people that generally have a negative attitude that way, in both *Staff* and *Operations*. You have some people out there who look at, "Well, I've got a good job, and I'm going to do the best at that job I can do. I'll take what comes down the road whether I like it or not and try to work with it. And hopefully, they'll take my input. And hopefully, if I open



my mouth and say anything, it's in a constructive way and not just criticizing and bringing it down."

**R:** At this point --

**R:** And that's important that people, no matter what kind of sour lemons you have got to suck in this job, that you at least do your job, and you always do your job, and say, "Okay. I'll suck that sour lemon. I don't care anymore." If they listen to you, and you feel like they're going to listen to you and you see something, yeah, it can reduce that chasm a little.

**FACILITATOR:** We're going to talk about that next. You bring up a good point, and it's probably a good segue to it, but before we go there, I want to get back to something that several people have brought up: perception. Do -- first of all, let me ask this. Do all of you agree that there even exists a chasm?

**R:** Yes.

**R:** {Several} Yes.

**R:** I agree that there's a perception of a chasm, even within ourselves.

**R:** And I'm not saying it's intentional. Or --

**FACILITATOR:** Right.

**R:** Oh, no, no, no.

**R:** I don't know how \_\_\_\_\_.

**FACILITATOR:** Right.

**R:** I don't know how big the chasm actually exists, but if, even within myself, I perceive that there's a chasm there because my first thing is, "Well, I don't think *Staff* is doing a damn thing." If I actually stopped and thought about, could I do my job effectively without Med Ops, without training, without Pub Ed, without maintenance, I couldn't.

**R:** You would never get air bottles. You would never get equipment repaired.

**R:** Yeah. Would I say, "Get rid of those guys. We can do it all ourselves?" Hell, no. Not even close.

**R:** The interesting part of that is, and I agree 100% with you, is for instance, the very last job that I had on *Staff*, I had some very bright people working for me who

worked their ass off, and who, I'm convinced, lost sight of the fact that the reason for their existence is to support *Operations* and help make costs for the ultimate service which is going to be provided by people in *Operations*. It wasn't a matter that there was any real bad attitude about it. It was just that they get very myopic in what they're doing, and they forget why they even exist.

**R:** Sure. That's the nature of the beast --

**R:** It's doesn't make them subordinate to the ultimate service and mission of response. It's just that there is a lot of things that have to go into it, and that chasm actually develops because the priorities I think are misplaced.

**FACILITATOR:** Does that lend credence to what I know I've heard lots of people say in *Operations*, and that *Staff* people they forgot where they came from? Or is it something different?

**R:** I haven't heard that in a while. I think it --

**R:** \_\_\_\_\_

**R:** I think that's a little bit simplistic. I think when you join a new team, you want to, in pursuit of the spirit of corps, you want to believe that what you do is very, very important and that the work that you do is necessary. Sometimes, to help make that necessary, you push other equally important things aside. You try to in your mind to raise the standards that you have rather than trying to think about that it actually interlocks with others.

**FACILITATOR:** So, let's try and concretize what I'm hearing and then let's see if people agree. If we think three dimensionally, maybe this chasm doesn't exist structurally. It exists perceptually -- in your perception and in your perspective?

**R:** I think there's a little of both, but the perception is greater than the reality.

**R:** There's a huge difference between the two jobs.

**R:** Right.

**R:** I mean, if we started in *Staff* and then went to *Operations*, and it may not be as bad as we went in *Operations*. It was such a great job, when you get on the *Staff*,  
--

**R:** I think everybody in the department --

**R:** -- it's a huge difference.

**R:** I think everybody should have a *Staff* assignment.

**R:** Let me add this one thing, though, that I think --

**R:** -- to get the appreciation for what the job demands.

**R:** It would benefit both sides.

**R:** Absolutely.

**R:** If organizations reflect, and I believe they do reflect their leadership ultimately, at least in the long term. I participated in several different jobs in *Staff*, I sat in meetings with the then fire chief and other people, who out of their own mouth looked at us and told those of us who were on *Staff* how wonderful we are, and how necessary we are, how we're the ones that run this fire department.

**FACILITATOR:** Hmmm..

**R:** And so, I think that it's very much of the reflection of the attitude of the leaders here that creates -- that promotes the gulf that exists oftentimes.

**FACILITATOR:** Which we've heard already a couple of times in regard to leadership. And that's a good move for me into my next area that I want to discuss, which you have already brought up. You were talking before about participation, really, in decisions and whether they value your input. And then, you said that occasionally they would communicate to you that you guys in *Staff* were the backbone. And I know that I have heard that before. So, what I want to discuss is what I characterize as "in the loop." Is everybody comfortable with me moving on, by the way?

**R:** {Several people} Sure.

**FACILITATOR:** Anybody just have something compelling that they wanted to say? Okay. In the loop, and "in the loop" we all have different ideas of what that means, I'm sure. If you will feast your eyes over here, for the purposes of today's discussion.

{Several people talking/laughing}

**R:** Terrible Tuesday. {Laughter}

**R:** Terrible Tuesday.

**FACILITATOR:** For the purposes of today's discussion, this is the way I would like for us to define "in the loop." (1) Access to information, (2) involvement in

programs, projects and decisions that affect the direction of this organization; 3) multiple work related links. Let me discuss that real quick. A work related link would be whether you as an *Operations* person have, by virtue of your function and your position, links to other sections and divisions, like, say, assistant chiefs and so forth within the department that are a product of your daily activities. For example, if you're assigned to, let's say, Chief Medical Officer over at Med Ops, he probably had several links to different sections and divisions in the department by virtue of his position. Okay? That's what I mean by multiple work related links. And finally, (4) access to people in positions of power, authority and influence. So, based on these criteria, what's the consensus in this room that are the thoughts and feelings -- regarding *Operations* people being "in the loop?"

**R:** Are you trying to say do *Operations* people feel like they are in the loop?

**FACILITATOR:** Exactly. Do you feel like, based on these criteria, that you are in the loop?

**R:** I feel at times I have been in the loop, but I would say on a whole, no. Of course I don't feel like I'm in the loop. And part of that is the isolation of fire stations versus where *Staff* people work. It's very possible for firefighters, once they are in, to go work at their fire station and have almost no interaction with *Staff* or anybody in any higher position. You have to interact with their officers and the battalion chief.

**R:** Want to use a case in point on that?

**FACILITATOR:** Sure.

**R:** We just got a new box map of the whole city. And they are changing boxes in our territory. And we actually run in that territory, I've got a box of changes and I don't know of anybody in *Staff* coming down here and saying, "Okay. We're changing the boundaries in some of these boxes. How is that going to affect you and your response? Better? Worse?"

**FACILITATOR:** Okay. But you didn't know that. Now that you know that, do you feel like you have somebody you could go talk to?

**R:** No. \_\_\_\_

**FACILITATOR:** So you would not be in the loop? Could I have feedback on that?

**R:** No. Um umm. \_\_\_\_ in the loop when \_\_\_\_ and I'm not in the loop now as far as for an example of that. But there's others I do, I feel.

**FACILITATOR:** What about the rest of you guys? Ya'll feel like you're in the loop? Or is it important for you to be in the loop?

**R:** It's like there's two loops.

**R:** Well, there's more than that.

**R:** *Operations*.

**R:** The loop is always changing. {Laughter}

**R:** As far as *Operations* {people talking at same time}. I'm at an operational loop, I feel like I know who to call and who to talk to, and --

**FACILITATOR:** Okay.

**R:** -- do what I need to get my job done. But as far as the *Staff*, if that's what you're defining as in the loop, at this time it looks like it's more pertaining to *Staff* positions. I don't feel like \_\_\_\_\_.

**FACILITATOR:** It's not written to support either *Operations* or *Staff*. This is just some elements that are in the literature that go with being "in the loop," as I term it, just for purposes of this focus group.

**R:** And some of these are formal positions and some could be called social positions.

**FACILITATOR:** Absolutely.

**R:** I think my job limits number two, and pretty much eliminates number three for me. So, I think it reduces my access to current information \_\_\_\_\_. I tend to hear about things after decisions have been made.

**FACILITATOR:** So, do you think you have involvement in decisions that affect this department?

**R:** No.

**FACILITATOR:** So, let me ask you guys this, and I want feedback from both sides of the coin if you guys have them. All I'm trying to do is just generate the discussion. Do you think that *Operations* in general, not necessarily you, but *Operations* in general, is in the loop? Or do you think that *Staff* wants *Operations* to be in the loop?

**R:** I don't think, in my opinion, *Operations* is in the loop. But a lot of these decisions being made have time constraints. They have only so much time to formulate that

and put it together and make a good decision. And it's a ponderous organization to go out there to everybody in *Operations*. But they have information and they have ways of accessing through battalion chiefs, through company officers and company school feedback. And like you sent out these surveys, that they can get information out and fairly quick, and they can put a time constraint on the survey due back, and it's time to use this information until it affects you, and this is your input. The actual leadership comes in. But you utilize this chain that you have of divisions, battalions, captain's school, individual companies, individual persons. And you can get that information back. But I don't think they're utilizing what they have out there.

**R:** There's still a real narrow bridge between *Operations* and *Staff*. See, I hear you talk about this loop in *Operations*, you're a company officer and this and that, about something that can affect both departments. The whole -- you know, if you look at it, we're like a machine and *Operations* is only a part of the machine, and admin and prevention and all these other divisions are support teams. And without the other we've discussed before, none of them do any good. As far as access to information, go to all the firefighters, drivers, lieutenants, captains in your district and ask them, "Hey, where is so-in-so in *Staff* right now?" They won't be able to tell you whether they're at headquarters or at Med Ops, or whether it's Op's Annex, Ops Support. It's like "Where is so-in-so's office?" "I have no idea?" "These phone lists. Is this a current phone list?"

**R:** No.

**R:** Call around. Try ordering supplies. The other day, I was trying to order medical forms. Okay? {People talking background and laughing}

**R:** \_\_\_\_\_ think you're pretty good a liar, aren't you? {Laughter}

**FACILITATOR:** What does that mean?

**R:** Well, I'll call a guy at Med Ops, a brand new Lieutenant down there, and he says, "Oh yeah. We've got them." He calls me back and says, "We don't have them." You know? "You need to order them from Reggie on the phone. He's got them." I leave a message with Reggie's office. Am I suppose say that? {Laughter} Reggie calls me back. He's basically irritated as Reggie can be. He says, "Oh, well those are available through the Administration ordering catalog."

**R:** So, now, my access to the information is finding 20's through three shifts of where my catalog is. And it's just like, "I'm doing this through drawers. PDE's are fine. And I'm saying, "Man. . . " Meanwhile, you know, I'm writing on the notepad again.

**R:** So where am I? I'm frustrated because there ain't no loop.

**FACILITATOR:** For you or for *Operations*?

**R:** Well, for me to gain access for particular information, I have to go -- it's like the old customer service thing. It's like, when you call the electric department, how many time do you get put on hold to get your service repaired? And you know that axiom is like, "Oh, you know, \_\_\_\_\_ want to hold. Don't use that."

**R:** What I would say is that you don't have to build the wiring for the loop. The wiring is there, it's just not being utilized.

**R:** Yeah. There you go.

**R:** A lot of this is relationship oriented. You know? How many people do you know where? Well, a lot of times, it's because you don't make the efforts to become involved and meet the people. Is it necessary to do your job? No. For the most part. But it cuts you out of a Chief walking up and saying, "What do you think about his?" Because he doesn't know you from Adam. You know? He might ask you, because more likely if he knows you, that you have dealt with him in the past on a certain level, he's going, "Hey, Tom, what do you think?" He might say that. And like I said, the loops are always changing, so it's a dynamic process. Things change. You think you're getting a lot of information. You kind of know what's going on? Six months later you feel like, "Man, I don't have any idea what's going on in this department." Because people move. Like I said, people move around. You say, "Well, there's some officer that I used to know real well and now it's somebody else. So, I don't feel like I know what's coming out anymore."

**FACILITATOR:** Right.

**R:** And I feel like easily a third to half of the department is probably in that boat, and doesn't have a whole lot of desire to develop the kind of relationships because they see a need to.

**FACILITATOR:** Based on these criteria, do you think that *Staff* is in loop as an entity?

**R:** They may be close, but --

**R:** Parts are.

**R:** Some of them are.

**R:** Yeah. Parts are.

**FACILITATOR:** More so than *Operations*?

**R:** It -- no. Again, I'd say parts of them. It depends on who you talk to.

**R:** But then again, with the makeup of *Operations*, three shifts, six battalions, that's just the nature of that. You're not going to create a continuous loop at all times. There's the B-shift loop. The C-shift loop. An A-shift loop with some overlaps. You know, when you have contact here.

**R:** Here's another loop. I'm at a station where a battalion chief is assigned. I'm a lot more in the loop than 29 is.

**R:** You're on that vacation loop! {Laughter}

**R:** Right. {Laughter} {All talking at the same time}

**R:** What was his name again?

**R:** You know? Maybe at the end -- after the meeting, the chief will go back and he'll type into the CAD such and such was talked about. And they get four bullets on a piece of paper, you know, "This, this and this." And then he'll come in and we might discuss it for an hour.

**FACILITATOR:** Do you have input in the decisions or is it just your told what's decided?

**R:** I don't know that I'd necessarily go that far. I at least get to make my opinion heard. To me it's satisfactory. You know? What you do after that is your business. You're the chief and you take it to wherever, because one thing we've got to be careful of is I hear little hints that we're not getting allowed to make any decisions or anything. Then a little while ago we're also saying, "We've got poor leadership." At some point, we have to say, we want leadership to do that, make these decisions, and find that fine line between letting us have some input. We can't cry about it both ways. No leadership, and they're making all the decisions without us.

**FACILITATOR:** Good point.

**R:** But I'll give you an example of a loop that's not just the chain of command the chief's bringing to meetings. We just had this test validation that has just started. When those rumors started coming out about that, the guys were starting to talk about it. "Man, what did they do now?" I said, "I don't know." And our chief was going to his meeting during the day, and I said, "Well, I'll call Chief Catt and ask him." And so, I did. I talked to him for a little while and he was nice enough. I mean, he did have to sit there, but he was nice enough. He says, "Yeah, Tom. I'll just tell you a little bit of what I know. This is not a lot." He told me. And



then, when our chief came out to the station and started talking about it, it turned out, I knew as much or maybe a little more than he did already.

**FACILITATOR:** So, maybe *Operations* folks do have access to information, they just don't pursue it.

**R:** Well, right. That's my point.

**R:** They do, but to get that out evenly across the board is relatively impossible.

**R:** And if Chief Catt had been getting 50 phone calls, all asking that same question, he probably wouldn't want to talk to me about it either....

**FACILITATOR:** So, maybe there's a limit to that.

**R:** In aviation, we have a term called "behind the power curve."

**FACILITATOR:** Okay.

**R:** When you get into a maneuver and you add power to get out of it, there's a point that you've added power too late and you can't complete the maneuver. And it's like dying. You've got to add that power and get up, and there's always somebody who is a little bit behind when this information comes out. They're going to have to move. We've got time constraints.

**FACILITATOR:** So, is *Operations* behind the "power curve?"

**R:** I believe in a lot of areas they are. But there's a lot of variables involved. It's people who are accessed to it, and they may be off on vacation. They may be sick. When they come back, they see things have changed since they've been gone. They haven't ridden out lately. They are behind when they get out there. "We're losing time."

**R:** Aviation? I don't know what your talking about. So, -- {laughter}

**R:** Gee, there's -- that's a good end of the loop.

**R:** Yeah. I'm behind the power curve.

**R:** I don't know what he's talking about either. {Laughter}

**R:** And so, -- {Laughter}

**R:** I covered for him.

**R:** There's formal and informal loops. I mean, the other one's getting on the phone and asking informally, "Well, what's going on?"

**R:** Exactly. And he felt comfortable enough to call the Chief up and say, "Chief, look. This is what's going on." How many other officers out there are like, "Well, I'm sure I can call the Chief up, but he doesn't know me. We've never met. I don't want to bother him. And I don't know. Would that mean he's not going through the chain of command?"

**R:** Yeah.

**R:** And pretty soon they've talked themselves out of it. You know, sit here and look at number four. Access to people in positions of power. Does every ten-year Fire Specialist feel like he does? I doubt it. I doubt it very seriously. I feel like I do, whether it's through just friendships, you know, having been where I've been. I feel like I have some access to some people and some power and authority. I know I can go to and get some information from them. Whether they're friendships, or kissing ass, or whatever you want to call it.

**FACILITATOR:** Which would be informal, but it's still there.

**R:** Right. Right. Yeah. That hasn't been given to me by the department or anything. That's just from meeting people and getting around.

**R:** Because believe it or not, that's very valuable for stitching the seams of the chasm as we spoke before. If I need information on anything prevention related, I was fortunate enough to have a prevention assignment. I know it -- I -- I don't have to call the generic number and say, "This is the information I need." I know exactly the guy to call. If I need plans review on a sprinkler, I'm calling Joe White. I know exactly that it's going across his desk.

**R:** Um hmm. Right.

**FACILITATOR:** So, your *Staff* experience has bridged the chasm for you in some respect?

**R:** It -- in that respect. {Several people talking} However, I still have the same for the other *Staff* branches. The administrative aspects. The medical operations aspects. Take our training division. I couldn't even begin to tell you what you need to do to be a relief driver, and I'm a company officer. Okay? I know that there's some memo that comes out every other month Phase I, II and III. I tell my guys, if you want the money, you had better get after it and find out on your own.

**R:** You give them an assignment.

**R:** Yeah. I'd give them an assignment. "You find out what you need to be a relief driver and bring it to me."

**FACILITATOR:** Okay. Let me jump in here so that I can move on to the next issue. Is there any consensus on this at all? Going back to a macro perspective, *Operations/Staff*, rather than you guys as individuals, do ya'll think that there's any difference regarding "in the loop" between the two groups?

**R:** I don't that it --

**FACILITATOR:** Is *Operations* less in the loop than *Staff*? Or are they equally in the Loop, or are they more in the loop?

**R:** I think --

**FACILITATOR:** Or can we -- can we say that?

**R:** I think they're still in the same loop, but the information is delayed in getting to them. They're not just current. The *Staff's* --

**R:** I think they are different loops. I think we've got a million different loops. There is no "the" loop.

**R:** I've got a problem with that definition "the" loop.

**R:** There is no "the" loop.

**R:** At least -- {several talking}

**R:** Executive *Staff* has "their" "the loop." They don't have a clue what's going on for the most part out there. I mean, they -- I mean -- I don't mean that --

**FACILITATOR:** Sure. {Laughter}

**R:** They're removed from it. They get reports. You know, they have their battalion chief's meetings and everything.

**R:** Right.

**R:** Maybe we ought to look at "the loop" as being a feedback loop as far as who is supporting who? Are -- we're supporting the command staff. As an *Operations* fire fighter, are we supporting the command staff? No, I look at it as them supporting me because the end of the line is when Mom says, "Is my baby going to be okay?" And I'm able to go, "Yeah. He's going to be just fine. You're not going to have anything to worry about."

**FACILITATOR:** Okay. So, the loop has degrees. And the loop is multi-faceted and we can't compartmentalize the issue. Right? Is that what I'm hearing?

**R:** Right {several people say "Yeah."}

**R:** And some people make more of an effort to be connected. Officers make more of an effort to be connected than a line fire fighter. He doesn't have a need to be connected. Although, I've got firefighters that say they're connected through the challenge program. They can call any assistant chief and ask them a question about the challenge and not hesitate to do that, and they're in the loop of that. But I'm totally out of that loop. But you make your personal, whatever you call it.

**R:** Common goals.

**R:** Common goals.

{Several people talking}

**R:** I mean, that's just over in my battalion. If it is, I'll see that it gets up to you.

**R:** Any time that you have to deal with an issue that is current, or heavy or hard, you have a tendency to go through your chain of command because it's safe. I've heard of fire fighters going directly to division chiefs and pissing off everybody in between. The company officer. What are you doing talking to chief so-in-so? The captain said it. The battalion chief said it. And that's -- if you're going to do business, and you're told that you're a *Line* or *Staff* organization, you're going to go through the chain of command. If I have a problem, I'm going to go to my station captain to start with, and usually directly pretty much my battalion chief. If I want something done in that respect. Usually, it's coming the other way.

{Several talking}

**R:** Something like the problem --

**R:** You were just trying to seek out information.

**R:** That para-military chain of command comes slowly down that line in transferring information. Right?

**R:** Yeah.

**R:** You know, and we've come a long way from 15 years ago of that being the only way. We're asking for ideas from the bottom now. They may get a little higher than maybe two or three years ago, but, you know, we are making the attempt to

do things differently. But just the nature of that para-military organization, that's what slows down the transfer of the information.

**FACILITATOR:** In both directions, you think?

**R:** Yeah.

**R:** Um hmm.

**FACILITATOR:** Does everybody think that? Or, do they not?

**R:** I think they are more going up than coming down.

**FACILITATOR:** And I guess, if you look at an organizational chart, which I can do as the facilitator of the group; your "up" is in *Staff*. Your "down" is in *Operations*. When you say going up and down. Right?

**R:** Right.

**FACILITATOR:** Right? I mean is there a consolidation of legitimate organizational authority in *Staff*, and not the equal consolidation of it in *Operations*? Does everybody agree to that?

**R:** {Several people - yeah}.

**R:** The operational aspect of the organization is that *Operations* are performing, because everything we do is from behind, like you were saying.

**FACILITATOR:** Well, *Operations* is the end result, the end product. Is *Operations* the point? Is *Operations* the point, or is that --

**R:** The goal to deliver with, like they've been hammering us with TQM is the service that we deliver to the citizens and the taxpayers out there in Austin is -- we're the ones who do the face-to-face with them. I mean, when they think fire department, they're looking at you and that emergency vehicle.

**FACILITATOR:** Yeah. And that's --

**R:** They're not looking at the guy sitting out there behind the desk. They're looking at us. Everything we do, we need them behind us so that we can deliver.

**R:** And that's one of the gripes, you know, with *Operations* guys. It builds animosity, which increases the gap, is you work at 7's. You work at 8, 18, 20's 17. You work at any of those places, and you're doing good just to wash behind your ears and do your paper work in one shift time. You lay on 70 building inspections and

two kid tours every shift of October, some in September, bleeding over into November, plus a pre-fire plan. If you start looking at all this stuff, you're going to have guys who are just going, "Well, some of this stuff is going to have to get canned, because it's not going to -- I just don't have enough time in one day." And your battalion chief comes down here and says, "Well, why can't you do this? The guys over at 10's are not having any problem with this."

**FACILITATOR:** Let me latch on to something that you said. Do you guys think that *Operations* is the point of the fire service? The point meaning in the military sense? Right? You're the lead function of this department. Is that role just in *Operations*, or is that role just in *Staff*?

**R:** I think we're the safety net, actually. When you look, you're talking about personal service and everything rolling down hill.

**FACILITATOR:** So, it's at the point or the end?

**R:** Well, I think we're at the end.

**R:** I think that fire departments are constituted to combat fire. But I also think that there's the two roles of prevention and emergency response that we provide.

**FACILITATOR:** So, is it a double pronged spear, which is the cart and which is the horse?

**R:** I think we're the point. All those things have come about to help us do our job. I think they both --

**R:** If they prevent it, they helped us to do our job.

{Several talking}

**R:** \_\_\_\_\_ about safety.

**R:** The thing of it is, you can do all the smoke detector programs, all the code compliance, all the prevention education, and all that stuff. But when those condos are burning in the middle of UT --

**FACILITATOR:** Can you *Staff* them away?

**R:** -- there's a big cluster. Yeah.

**R:** The stations are out there doing prevention, but the stations are out there responding to emergencies too. It's the guys out there in *Operations* that are going out and doing everything that *Staff* guys write in mission statements and the

policies. We're out there doing this for the department. That's why I say we're the point. The end mission will come right down to everybody out here.

**R:** On that perspective I agree that we would be the point. However, you have to realize that there are some big things going on in Austin that are being taken care in other divisions. There's no way that you're going to get --

**R:** Staff.

**R:** Yeah. Staff, because --

**R:** That's what I mean. I have never been in *Staff* so I really can't \_\_\_\_\_

**R:** There's no way you're going to get code compliance on an ABMC or a Motorola Plant from an *Operations* position

**FACILITATOR:** So, what I want to know is who -- where's the tip of the spear?

**R:** It's in *Operations* because -- and the reason I feel this is because your positive public perception is built on a service delivered out in the field. That's where we get our good reputation. That's where people get this positive perception.

**FACILITATOR:** I see some nodding heads.

**R:** Those people aren't at home thinking, "Thank God, that *Staff* person is over there --

**R:** Right.

**R:** -- you know, keeping Samsung from doing anything stupid \_\_\_\_\_."

**R:** Well, we have --

**R:** They don't even know that *Staff* exists unless they've had some kind of relationship.

**R:** But I think our public -- I agree, overwhelmingly, that's the product we crank out. I think we have also produced a different product on a smaller volume that has its own constituency and that's the builders and developers and property owners that have contact with us. They may not be Maw and Paw sitting at home thinking about the fire stations. Very much, they have -- they receive a service from us.

**FACILITATOR:** Where do you see the tip of the spear? Or, is it not that black and white for you?

**R:** I think that we're going to have to focus on only one thing, and only one point of the operation. I think there's a second \_\_\_\_\_.

**FACILITATOR:** Okay. Yeah. That's what I'm asking.

**R:** \_\_\_\_\_ Who is he? He's the fire guy.

{Several talking at once}

**R:** That's the whole reason they're getting into that customer service book. I mean, you've got like, "Mrs. Hint."

**R:** Uh hmm.

**R:** Our team character. And everything said and everything we do in this department to be progressive and to stay abreast of what's going on in the chambers and to adapt or die is a sort of a service for her.

**FACILITATOR:** Yeah.

**R:** But it's also -- it's pre-emergency and emergency. It's what's going on in the world when there's not any incidents going on, and it's what's going on in the world when there are. But at your incidents, your *Operations* guys are top dog, top notch.

**R:** But that's all you're getting credit for.

**FACILITATOR:** Well, let me ask it a different way.

**R:** It has a much more grand perception.

**R:** Exactly.

**R:** Man, they saved that building it. They saved those babies.

**R:** I think \_\_\_\_\_

{Several talking}

**R:** They helped that guy out of that car. Sure. That -- you're talking about life and limb.

**FACILITATOR:** Let me ask it a different way, then we've got to move so that you guys can -- I can keep it to my promised hour. If you had to pick -- if the public --



in your opinion, if the public had to pick *Staff* or *Operations*, where do you think they would \_\_\_\_\_?

**R:** {Several say "*Operations*."}

**R:** Have to pick them for what?

**FACILITATOR:** The tip of the spear. If we could only have one of those functions provide service to the public, which one would the public pick?

**R:** Oh, without a doubt, *Operations* to say the least. There's no doubt about it.

**FACILITATOR:** All right. Let's move on. Last issue, and I've got ten minutes.

{Several talking}

**FACILITATOR:** Okay. This one is going to be a little bit more.

**R:** We could stay until 2:15 \_\_\_\_\_ {Laughter}.

**FACILITATOR:** This one may be a little bit strange. We've seen major changes within the department over the years. Would everybody agree with that?

**R:** Uh hmm {several people}

**FACILITATOR:** There's been lots of different changes in lots of different areas. One area in particular that has received a great deal of attention and both positive and negative attention has been the new hiring process. We have gone from what could be argued a very rigid civil service controlled objective hiring process, to a less rigid, non civil service intensive, some people argue, subjective process. It's been a change. It's been very thoroughly discussed at the fire houses, in *Staff* and *Operations*. Just as a group, what do ya'll think of the new hiring process? How do you think it affects the department, and how do you think it will affect the department downstream? Would you guys check to see if that tape recorder is still going? That's my project. {Laughing}

**R:** We unplugged it from the wall. {Laughter}

**FACILITATOR:** We'll meet again next week, Tom. {Laughter} But back to that question, the hiring process. What do we think? Honest opinions here...

**R:** I joined or I volunteered to be one of the B-pad evaluators so that I would know more about the process. I don't know all there is. I don't know how the class that got picked eventually got picked. And I did that for my own information. And I'm hoping, because I don't have any other viable options, I'm not a real big fan on

civil service rigidity because I see a lot of people that can study that book and recall it on a test that are just absolutely terrible officers. And I hate to see people come in this department that are absolutely terrible fire fighters. I saw, as I was working the video, some people are probably very smart people. But I would hate to be subordinate to them or \_\_\_\_\_.

**FACILITATOR:** So, what are you saying about the hiring process?

**R:** I like the aspect of the B pad. I like the aspect of the Board and review by the peers, by fire fighters, both new fire fighters and old fire fighters. I like everything. The weighted part is what I'm not sure about. And I guess only time will tell. I'm not ready to make a judgment on it. I see a lot of weight on it and I think a lot of people's fears are based on emotions. Because they start weighing their emotions in different ways.

**FACILITATOR:** So, was it the chip away? I've heard this in Fire Stations, the first chip at our civil service status, and next it's going to be promotions, and then it's going to be who knows what?

**R:** It's a fear that people have.

**FACILITATOR:** Anybody else?

**R:** Well, yeah.

**R:** I -- I \_\_\_\_\_

**R:** Oh, go ahead. I'm sorry.

**R:** What \_\_\_\_\_

**FACILITATOR:** Well, you tell me.

**R:** \_\_\_\_\_ promotion.

**FACILITATOR:** Well, what do you think?

**R:** I think it's just like coming in. I think you have a test to promote a person to a position that's going to be making a life or death decision. My problem is that you see a person, he may have been at 18 points and may be a terrible writer. He may be the most slovenly dressed to do a presentation or need to shave. He uses his sick time. Never shows up and never works. He scores number one. He's an officer. And that's the leadership. I have a complaint with that, thinking that --

**FACILITATOR:** Does the hiring process fix that?

**R:** It address it, because you're measuring other qualities besides his written testing ability. From what I have seen, the quality of the person that is coming in in this class, which is all we have to judge this on so far is equal to any other classes coming in, across the board. I don't see that we're hiring inferior people, which was a big fear and concern. I don't see that. I do agree that if you're hiring under different set of consideration, we feel these qualities were important, that down the line as you promote, you're going to have continue to weigh those qualities because you can't justify going back in just one test. Maybe you didn't hire him in under one test. You just have a logic problem pretty soon.

**R:** When it will actually take place is the time issue.

**R:** Well, when you hear some folks saying it's lowering your standard, I don't understand how it could lower it.

**R:** Well, I don't see that. I don't see that.

**R:** Well, some of you have been on the interview board. Being on the interview boards before this process and during this process, and these look like the same people.

**R:** And I've been on the interview board and I've been on the B-pad review board, and I've gone back and obeyed the guy in the station as difficult as some people who won't have a lot of \_\_\_\_\_. It really won't do you any good. But they don't -

**R:** Without getting involved in the process, it's hard to make an informed decision on whether the process is good or bad. So, you've got to educate yourself. And that's why I went down and enlisted. "What is this all about. I want to be a part of it. Because if I can get my input on this for my vast experience, I would like to. And that's how my little -- that's the way I did it to get into the loop, to get into my --

**FACILITATOR:** So, you could understand it.

**R:** Yeah. I would interview and I can review tapes, and I think \_\_\_\_\_ for that.

**FACILITATOR:** Is that an objective process?

**R:** I thought it was.

**FACILITATOR:** Does everybody, on a scale of one to ten, where would you place your understanding of the hiring process? Ten being full understanding.

**R:** I think I've got about a 9 1/2 on it.

**FACILITATOR:** Yeah. But you're cheating.

**R:** You wrote it.

**R:** I'm in the four range.

**FACILITATOR:** You're four.

**R:** I'd say about a six. I participated in oral interview boards, so I have knowledge there. And then, I agree with Tom that the candidates that I saw, I was really amazed on some of their credentials and their educational background. We got a -  
- I think we got a good lot. I don't see it as lowering standards. I would go even so far as I feel it's been increased.

**FACILITATOR:** Really?

{Several talking}

**R:** But during this process, I didn't feel I was forced. I didn't feel there was any pressure at all on who passed the interview and who didn't.

**FACILITATOR:** Okay. Well, where do you place yourself?

**R:** About a six or seven. Right in that range.

**R:** I feel very comfortable.

**FACILITATOR:** Nine and a half?

**R:** Yeah.

**R:** About a six. \_\_\_\_\_

**R:** And I would say -- {Laughter}

**R:** Five.

**FACILITATOR:** Five. Okay.

**R:** The questions I have are is how its weighted, also. I'm not real sure. They put that written exam back in there which I thought really alleviated a lot of people's concern on where that written exam was in the process. But everything else, and

I've got questions about the B-Pad, but I'm not like real formal with it and understand it. But the oral interview phase was very rigid and people either got broke there or they made it.

**FACILITATOR:** Okay. Here's the final question. What I'm hearing from this room is that the jury is still out on how the hiring process is going to affect the department in the future, but based on your expedience on participating in it, you think it's equally as well as the old system, maybe even better.

**R:** No, I -- better.

**FACILITATOR:** Better. Okay. What do you think, in your opinion, *Operations* in general thinks of the hiring process? Based on your interaction with people in the field.

**R:** Don't like it. {Several saying "don't like it"}

**R:** Because it's a change.

**R:** Everybody is threatened by change.

**R:** That's it.

**R:** It's a big change. And considering most of them love to hunt and fish, they don't like change. Okay? {Laughter}

**R:** Well, we're the ones who have to communicate the change.

**R:** It's going to take time to get.

**R:** \_\_\_\_\_ {Several talking}

**R:** Right. It's going to take time. You're selling out you bastards. {Laughter} So, I mean, it's going to take time. But on the diversity question, I don't see where, and I don't think they know either, and they've even stated that they didn't know if this was going to give them the diversity they're searching for because you look at the makeup of the class and there are more females, but other than seeing a bigger ethnic makeup, \_\_\_\_\_ Tom, I don't know what the makeup is of the class.

**R:** Was that the most -- was that the primary objective of this?

**R:** That was the perceived.

**R:** That was the perceived.

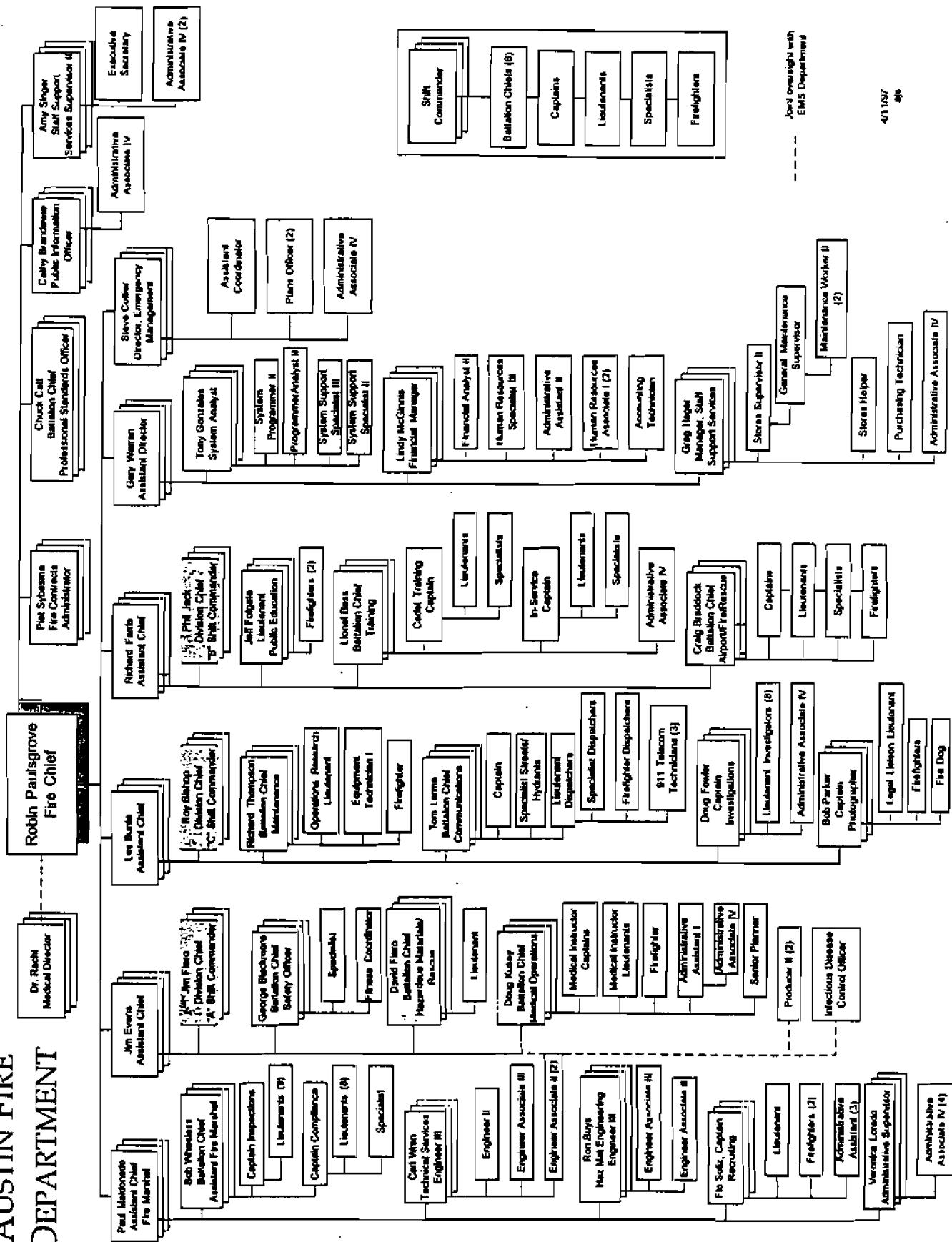
**R:** Perceived.

***FACILITATOR:*** Exactly. Standby. Wait. Wait.

{End }

## **Appendix D**

# AUSTIN FIRE DEPARTMENT



Joint Oversight with  
EMS Department



## **Appendix E**

# Glossary of Terms

Like most technical professions, the Fire Service maintains its own customs, norms and rituals. Perhaps the most confusing of these, and certainly the most frustrating for the non-initiated, is the industry's vernacular. Like some esoteric, fraternal rite, firefighters can speak in a language that is absolutely foreign to the outside observer. Words that have accepted meaning in the "real" world are employed completely out of context within the Fire Service. To hopefully prevent confusion, this rudimentary glossary is provided. If you find yourself, in the course of reading this document, scratching your head in wonderment, simply refer to this glossary. Maybe it will clear things up a bit. This list, of course, is by no means all-inclusive.

## Terms

- Battalion:*** One of six geographic divisions within the city limits, separated by response areas. Each Battalion maintains approximately 5-8 Stations and is under the authority of one Battalion Chief. Within each Battalion are approximately 40-55 firefighters and officers. Firefighters will also refer to a Battalion as a "District" or "Territory."
- BPAD:*** An element in the new hiring process adopted by the department in 1996. BPAD is an acronym for Behavioral Personnel Assessment Devices, which essentially is a video tape that potential recruits interact with; BPAD reviewers later view the interaction between applicant and tape and rank their performance.
- Call:*** An emergency incident that firefighters respond to; may also be referred to as "Incident," "Run," "Response," "Still" or "Alarm." Firefighters may also refer to a "call" by the type of incident, such as "Medical," "Structure Fire," "False," etc.
- Captain's School:*** A Line group of two or three Stations that meet regularly, under the authority of one Captain, for in-house training and skills practice.
- Chief:*** A confusing title which may refer to any of four levels of Chief within the department. The Fire Chief is the Executive Officer of the department, the Assistant Chief is the Assistant Executive Officer, the Division Chief is in charge of one of the three Line-arm Divisions -- A, B or C -- and the Battalion Chief is in charge of a Line Battalion or a Staff Section. Firefighters will refer to any of the four levels of chief simply as "Chief," which makes for some confusing interpretations if the context of the discussion is not clear.
- Command Staff:*** The executive body of the fire department which consists of the Fire Chief, four Assistant Chiefs and one Assistant Administrator. This body is also referred to as the "Executive Staff."

## ***Glossary, cont.***

***Company:*** The unit assignment within the Line functional group. If a firefighter is assigned to Engine Company 4, she is assigned to Station 4 and rides on the Engine. Many variations of the word may be seen such as "Company Officer," "Company unity," or "Company Assignment." They all refer to the actual unit the employee is assigned to.

***Division:*** Firefighters work on a 24-hour on, 48-hour off schedule, thus there are three separate work schedules. Each of the three 24-hour schedules is considered a Division and is labeled as A, B, or C Divisions. Each Division is under the authority of one Division Chief. Firefighters will also refer to Divisions as "Shifts."

***In The Loop:*** A descriptive concept employed in this study to test certain working hypotheses. "In the loop" is described as 1) access to information, 2) involvement in programs, projects and decisions, 3) multiple work-related links, and 4) access to people in positions of authority.

***Inspection:*** A walk-through inspection of mercantile occupancies within the response territory of a particular Station. These inspections are conducted to locate and correct obvious fire hazards, to give firefighters an opportunity to become familiar with structures within their territory and to interact with the public they protect. "Inspections" may also refer to the Inspections Section, within the Prevention Bureau, which is a Staff functional group.

***MedOps:*** Short for Medical Operations, a functional group within the Staff arm of the department. The Medical Operations section is responsible for firefighter medical certification, continuing education, apparatus supply and medical partnering with Austin Emergency Medical Services.

***Operations:*** The Line functional category within the Fire Service. Firefighters will frequently refer to the Line Division as "Operations," "Combat," and "Field." Each title refers to the response-arm of the fire service, or the Line group for this study.

***PubEd:*** Short for Public Education, which is both a mission of the department and a Section within the Staff arm of the organization. In general terms, public education refers to the department's role in educating the public on the fire problem, the role of the department in the community, and fire safe practices. Departments world-wide are becoming increasingly more active in public education as a form of proactive hazard intervention.

***Prevention:*** Both an organizational mission and a Staff functional group. The "Prevention Mission" refers to non-emergency related activities designed to reduce the fire problem within the community, such as public education, building inspections, plans review, etc. The Prevention Section (also Bureau or Division) is the Staff group responsible for providing many of these services. Line members are becoming increasingly more involved in prevention efforts through such activities as in-service inspections, public education events and community-based activities.

## ***Glossary, cont.***

- Section:*** A Staff functional group, such as the Public Education Section, Prevention Section or Training Section. Often, "Section" will be referred to as Division, Bureau, or Group.
- Station:*** The fire station that a firefighter is assigned to, such as Station 32. "Station" may also be referred to as "House," or "Assignment."
- Training:*** A functional Section within the Staff arm of the department. The Training Section is responsible for recruit training and firefighter continuing education. Training also refers to in-house skills and knowledge training.
- Worm:*** A joke, prank or distasteful event. Depending on the context, a "worm" can refer to a hilarious practical joke between firefighters or some executive decision that firefighters find distasteful. Context is everything when interpreting the use of this word.