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Retention of Internal Stakeholders in the U.S. Volunteer Fire Service

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Candice McDonald

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Walden University
2016

Abstract

Retention of Internal Stakeholders in the U.S. Volunteer Fire Service

by

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MS, Malone University, 2012

BS, Malone College, 2009

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

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Abstract

Volunteer firefighters make up almost 75% of the U.S. fire service. Fire service leaders face challenges in retaining volunteers, as evident by the 12% decline in volunteer firefighters since 1984. The purpose of the study was to explore what strategies fire service leaders have used to retain firefighters in the United States. The conceptual framework of this single case study was Freeman's stakeholder theory, which states that leaders can maximize the organization's performance by meeting the needs of those with a stake in the future of the organization. Face-to-face, semistructured interviews were conducted with a purposeful sample of 5 fire service leaders from Somerset County, New Jersey who had successfully implemented strategies for volunteer firefighter retention. Interview transcripts and supporting documents were explored using a modified Van Kaam model as a basis to analyze and create common themes for coding. Through methodological triangulation, 6 volunteer firefighter retention strategy themes emerged: a) schedule accommodations, (b) nonwage benefits, (c) opportunities for employee success, (d) recognition, (e) family, and (f) recruitment. From these 6 themes, 2 of the most successful retention strategies used by fire service leaders were identified as restructuring requirements for schedule accommodation and offering professional development. Specific recommendations from the research findings for retention include offering training, flexible scheduling, providing uniforms, family inclusion, and employee recognition. Implications for positive social change include offering strategies needed to improve the retention of volunteer firefighters, which may lead to the retention of public service employees to foster a high-quality workforce to serve the public.

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Dedication

This study is dedicated to my three amazing children, Gage, Madison, and Mya. You three are the reason I pushed through to the end. Remember, always finish what you start and never give up on your dreams. To my husband, who is my best friend, thank you for being so supportive during this process and taking on more than your share to see my dreams become a reality. And to my parents, who would follow me around the world to show their love and support, thank you for everything.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Background of the Problem

Volunteers make up almost three-fourths of U.S. fire services (Frattaroli et al., 2013). Both city and rural communities rely on the response of unpaid firefighters (Haug & Gaskins, 2012). The United States Fire Administration (USFA; 2015b) noted a downward trend among the number of volunteer firefighters over the past 30 years. This increasing decline in first responder volunteers is a significant concern for fire service organizations (NVFC, 2016; USFA, 2015b). Turnover among volunteer firefighters can also have a harmful financial impact to fire service organizations (NVFC, 2016) because employee turnover can deteriorate the cohesion and productivity of an organization (Wang, Wang, Xu, & Ji, 2014).

Although prior research has examined the employee retention challenges of the volunteer fire service (Frattaroli et al., 2013; Haug & Gaskins, 2012; NVFC, 2016), the current literature does not include recommended strategies for volunteer fire service leaders to work with employees to prevent turnover. This lack of strategies to retain emergency service volunteers is a concern in the United States (Haug & Gaskins, 2012). The average annual cost of one paid firefighter is \$71,500 (USFA, 2007); therefore, moving from a volunteer to a paid fire service organization is not an option for most fire departments. Most volunteer fire service organizations lack the financial ability to add pay as an incentive for retention (USFA, 2015d). This study was designed to generate a deeper understanding of how fire service leaders retain volunteers to help future fire service leaders implement strategies to improve firefighter retention.

Problem Statement

The U.S. volunteer fire service is experiencing its biggest challenge to date with volunteer firefighter retention (USFA, 2015b). The number of volunteer firefighters in the United States has decreased by 12% since 1984 (USFA, 2015b), which has significant ramifications because the cost to replace 10 professionals is approximately \$120,000 (Laddha, Singh, Gabbad, & Gidwani, 2012). The general business problem is involuntarily firefighter turnover within a volunteer fire department negatively affects the financial sustainability of a department. The specific business problem is some volunteer fire service leaders lack strategies to retain volunteer firefighters.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies volunteer fire service leaders use to retain volunteer firefighters. The study participants were five volunteer fire service leaders from Somerset County, New Jersey, who had successfully improved volunteer firefighter retention. This study promotes social change by providing fire service leaders with strategies to retain volunteer firefighters and contribute to a high-quality workforce to serve the public, which is a priority emphasized by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (2013).

Nature of the Study

I used a qualitative methodology to explore the issue of the need for strategies in retaining volunteer firefighters. Researchers use a qualitative method to explore connections among various issues to understand the current phenomenon in real-life context (Ruzzene, 2015). The advantage of utilizing a qualitative method over

quantitative or mixed methods of research is participants can offer rich data that researchers can code and analyze to answer research questions (Dominik & Gluesing, 2013). Researchers using a quantitative method examine *cause and effect* or the relationship and differences among variables (Watkins, 2012), which was not the focus of this study. A researcher using a mixed-method design includes statistical procedures (Naidu & Patel, 2013), which was not appropriate for this study since the intent of this study was to explore qualitative phenomena.

I used a single case study design for this study. Researchers use case study design to provide a persistent form of analysis from diverse sources (Ruzzene, 2015; Yin, 2014), and to provide an in-depth understanding of a certain phenomenon (Dresch, Lacerda, & Cauchick Miguel, 2015). Researchers using a qualitative case study design explore the actual issue as illustrated by the cases while retaining a real-world perspective (Yin, 2014). Researchers use case-based reasoning to identify leadership methods and to assist with driving policy change (Ruzzene, 2015). Case-based reasoning aligns with the purpose of the study to provide an exploration of strategies fire service leaders use to retain volunteer firefighters.

I considered and rejected several alternate designs. In a phenomenological design, a researcher attempts to understand the participants' lived experiences of a phenomenon (Bourne, 2015; Moustakas, 1994), which was not the intent of this study. Researchers use grounded theory to study shared group experiences and generate one or more new theories (Watkins, 2012), which was not the intent of this study. Researchers use ethnography for understanding individual cultures (Watkins, 2012), which was not the

intent of this study. I therefore rejected these alternate designs in favor of a single case study design.

Research Question

The goal of this qualitative case study was to answer the following research question: What strategies do volunteer fire service leaders use to retain volunteer firefighters?

Interview Questions

The following interview questions were used to answer the main research topic.

1. What strategies do you use to retain volunteer firefighters within your organization?
2. What barriers to implementing retention strategies do you face?
3. How do you address implementation barriers?
4. What strategies do you use to retain volunteer firefighters with outside family and career commitments?
5. How do you assess the effectiveness of retention?
6. What additional information would you like to provide that I have not asked?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was based on Freeman's (1984) stakeholder theory. Stakeholder theory offered a possible explanation for organizational success and stakeholder support because of its premise that leaders base their actions on the interest of stakeholders more than on self-serving agendas (Harrison & Wicks, 2013). Key concepts underlying the theory are (a) stakeholder value, (b) mutual interests, and (c)

stakeholder relationships (Hörisch, Freeman, & Schaltegger, 2014). I specifically used stakeholder theory for viewing and understanding specific leadership strategies for maintaining volunteer firefighter success, in alignment with Harrison and Wicks (2013).

Researchers have used stakeholder theory in disciplines such as public policy, law, and healthcare (Harrison & Wicks, 2013). Harrison and Wicks (2013) identified stakeholder theory as an appropriate method for bridging strategies to stakeholder interests to create value for all involved. Integrating strategy aligns with the United States Fire Administration's (2012) goal to create a culture in the fire service that offers value to the industry. Researchers using stakeholder theory look to improve the effectiveness of an organization through developing and maintaining symbiotic relationships with internal stakeholders (Maier, 2015). I therefore selected stakeholder theory as a suitable basis for the conceptual framework.

Operational Definitions

Fire duty crew: A crew existing to provide manpower during a specific timeframe to ensure staffing is in place for timely response to emergencies (Florence Township Fire Department, 2010).

Organizational commitment: The willingness of an individual to invest and contribute to an organization they serve (Ching-Fu & Yu, 2014).

Organizational connectedness: Organizational connectedness is a strong sense of belonging with other members of the organization and the services provided (Huynh et al., 2013).

Psychological contract: The psychological contract refers to the employee's beliefs regarding what their employer owes them for work-place contributions (Low, Bordia, & Bordia, 2016).

Stakeholders: Internal and/or external groups and/or individuals that can impact organizational success (Freeman, 2010; Schlierer et al., 2012).

Volunteer: A person who dedicates his or her personal time and receives little or no compensation for the effort (Mano & Giannikis, 2013).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are views a group or individual perceives as being factual (Martin & Parmar, 2012). In order to properly interpret research findings, it is important for researchers to identify underlying assumptions (Kirkwood & Price, 2013). Kirkwood and Price (2013) indicated failing to recognize assumptions might cause research results to be questionable. Understanding personal biases and assumptions can strengthen the outcome of the research.

The three assumptions in this study were that (a) the participants would be able to recall retention strategies, (b) the interview questions would prompt the participants to describe retention strategies of volunteer firefighters, and (c) the participants would respond openly and honestly to all interview questions. The data from the interview process will assist in determining the validity of the assumptions.

Limitations

Limitations within a study refer to potential weaknesses that a researcher has no control over that can affect the outcome of a research study (Mitchell & Jolly, 2010). Limitations of a study are important for identifying weaknesses and opportunities for future research (Helm, Renk, & Mishra, 2016). The first limitation of this study was the possibility of participants being reluctant to disclose all information necessary for fully evaluating the strategies fire service leaders use to retain employees. The second limitation was that not all experiences and strategies of participants might be transferable to all fire service organizations. The final limitation was the possibility of not being able to locate a fire service organization willing to participate in the study with full transparency.

Delimitations

Delimitations of a study are the boundaries or restrictions that a researcher imposes (Guni, 2012; Mitchell & Jolly, 2010). One delimitation was the purposeful inclusion of participants from U.S. volunteer fire services only. Inclusion of fire service leaders outside of the United States would have required resources extending past the scope of this project. There are over 30,000 career and volunteer fire departments in the United States (USFA, 2015c), and a second delimitation was the purposeful exclusion of career fire departments. The research for this study consisted of interviews with volunteer fire service leaders from New Jersey.

Significance of the Study

The data from this study may be of value to U.S. fire services because stakeholder support can lead to organizational sustainability (Harrison & Wicks, 2013). The USFA (2015a) indicated fire service leaders face a variety of challenges managing personnel and some lack effective leadership strategies. The USFA indicated fire service leaders need to create a culture for future leaders to improve the industry (USFA, 2012), which is consistent with stakeholder theory.

The results of this study are intended contribute to positive social change by offering fire service leaders the strategies needed to support the retention of volunteer firefighters. Retaining employees in public service can lead to the creation of a high-quality workforce to serve the public (United States Office of Personnel Management, 2013). With over one million fires a year, the 1,140,750 firefighters in the United States constantly interact with the public (USFA, 2015c). The results of this study may encourage fire service leaders to adopt specific strategies to retain volunteer firefighters, which supports the USFA's (2015b) goal to maintain a strong fire service now and in the future for supporting fire protection needs of the public.

Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

This qualitative case study included an exploration of employee retention strategies to reduce the impact of turnover through a review of professional literature. Onwuegbuzie, Leech, and Collins (2012) indicated a literature review is the most important step in the qualitative study research process. The purpose of a literature review is to synthesize and summarize literature as it relates to the topic (Onwuegbuzie et

al., 2012). A literature review allows a researcher to gain support for the research topic, identify contributing literature, and develop an understanding of the conceptual framework (Rowley, 2012).

The literature review section includes a full review utilizing key search terms and phrases. Helpful academic databases for collecting literature included ProQuest, Business Source Complete, EBSCOhost, Emerald Management Journals, and Goggle Scholar. Peer-reviewed sources and other scholarly publications included in the literature review range from 1984 to 2016; peer review status was verified using Ulrichsweb Global Serials Directory. Access points to academic databases for this study included Walden University and Kent State University libraries.

The key search terms used to identify literature on retention in the fire service included *employee retention*, *volunteer retention*, *organizational commitment*, *turnover*, *work-life balance*, *firefighter retention*, and *internal stakeholder*. The proceeding subsections include a synthesis of each key topic to demonstrate a connection to the study. I used an Excel spreadsheet to track sources to ensure that a minimum of 85% of the literature review material in this study meets peer-review requirements and were published within five years of the expected degree completion date. The literature review includes 84 scholarly sources, of which 75 are peer-reviewed articles, four are books, and five are government sources. The percentage of sources in the literature review published within five years of my expected graduation date is 95%.

To provide a better understanding of retention in the fire service, I discuss with a background of the decline of volunteer firefighters in the United States and the cost of

firefighter turnover. The literature review includes the following themes: sleep deprivation, retention issues specific to female firefighters; mental health; work-life balance; generational factors; organizational climate and commitment; job satisfaction; retention strategies; references relation to the conceptual framework; and alternate theories.

Decline of Volunteer Firefighters in the United States

The majority of emergency service organizations in the U.S. consist of unpaid volunteers (Haug & Gaskins, 2012). There are over one million firefighters in the United States, with 71% being volunteers (Frattaroli et al., 2013; Haynes, & Stein, 2016). Only 15% of the 29,980 fire departments in the United States do not utilize volunteer firefighters (USFA, 2015c). The decline in the number of volunteer firefighters in the United States supports the importance for research on firefighter retention.

A current concern for U.S. fire services is the declining trend of emergency service volunteers (Haug & Gaskins, 2012). There has been a 12% decline in the volunteer fire service since 1984 (USFA, 2015b). The literature on retention in emergency services includes many factors contributing to a volunteer separating from a fire service organization. Viewing some of the factors provides a deeper understanding of the issues fire service leaders face with retaining volunteers. Reviewing literature on volunteer and employee turnover in general also provides a better sense of issues organizations as a whole experience with retention.

The Cost of Firefighter Turnover

The cost of turnover is a significant issue for the U.S. volunteer fire service; many volunteer fire service organizations do not have the ability to add pay as an incentive for retention (USFA, 2015d). The average annual cost of salary and benefits for a single paid career firefighter is \$71,500 (USFA, 2007). Volunteer firefighters donate approximately \$139.8 billion per year worth of time each year (Hall, 2014). In general, only one third of all volunteers make the commitment to serve with an organization from year to year (Waters & Bortree, 2012). Excessive turnover within a volunteer fire service organization negatively affects the sustainability of the department. A high firefighter turnover rate can also be costly to fire departments because of training and protective equipment costs. The cost to outfit and train a firefighter is approximately \$27,095 (NVFC, 2016), and the average cost to replace 10 trained professionals within an organization is approximately \$120,000 (Laddha, Singh, Gabbad, & Gidwani, 2012).

The cost of involuntarily turnover exceeds the direct financial impact. Organizations with high rates of turnover are vulnerable for the loss of intangible assets and weak organizational cohesion (Wang, Wang, Xu, & Ji, 2014). Turnover leads to the demoralization of remaining volunteers and negatively affects the beneficiaries the organization serves (McBride & Lee, 2012). Employee turnover is a significant factor in poor morale and declining productivity in the public sectors (Huffman, Casper, & Payne, 2014). High turnover and the intention of turnover within an organization can also be damaging to an organization's reputation (Qazi, Khalid, & Shafique, 2015). This suggests that reducing turnover is a key issue for volunteer fire services.

Barriers to Retention

Sleep deprivation. Volunteer firefighters often balance careers and large amounts of time training to prepare for emergency response (NVFC, 2016). Long working hours increases the risk of sleep disturbance and psychological distress (Virtanen, Stansfeld, Fuhrer, Ferrie, & Kivimäki, 2012). Cvirn, Dorrian, Smith, Jay, Vincent, and Ferguson (2015) found that the occupation of firefighting exposes firefighters to the stressor of sleep restriction. Sleep deprivation for firefighters can derive from a firefighter being awoken during the night to deploy to an emergency (USFA, 2016), but negatively impacts the retention of emergency services personnel (Blau, 2011). Volunteer firefighters report an average of three to six hours of sleep during nights of deployment (Cvirn et al., 2015), suggesting a high incidence of sleep deprivation.

Blau (2011) also found another contributing factor leading to sleep deprivation is the common work stress firefighters experience. Common work stresses in firefighting include exposure to trauma, diseases, job related injuries, and providing services to difficult people (Blau, 2011). Jay, Smith, Windler, Dorrian, and Ferguson (2016) corroborated Blau (2011) and Cvirn et al. (2015), finding that inadequate sleep also leads to poor performance and impacts safety for volunteer firefighters.

Retention issues specific to female firefighters. The fire service is classified as a male-dominated field (Sinden et al., 2013), with only 9% of volunteer firefighters being female (Haynes & Stein, 2016). Waters and Bortree (2012) explored the barriers to retention specific to females and suggested a need for organizational leaders to examine successful methods to retain female volunteers. In general, women volunteer more than

men do by a ratio of 3:1 (Waters & Bortree, 2012). This general ratio does not hold true for the fire service. The fire service is classified as a male-dominated field (Sinden, Macdermid, Buckman, Davis, Matthews, & Viola, 2013), with only 9% of volunteer firefighters being female (Haynes & Stein, 2016). A study by Johnson and Tunheim (2016) also identified developing strategies to retain women within an organization as a key step in maximizing human capital and identifying the strongest pool of candidates for leadership positions.

Jahnke et al. (2012) argued the physical and psychological strain of firefighting are two major health issues specific to the retention of women in the fire service. A survey of female firefighters conducted by Sinden et al. (2013) indicated firefighting is both physical and mentally demanding. The physical aspect of the job is a barrier for some women entering the fire service (Jahnke et al., 2012; Sinden et al., 2013;). For example, women have an 85% failure rate versus men's 9% failure rate when taking the standard entry test for entering the fire service (Sinden et al., 2013). Female firefighters also have 33% more injuries than males (Sinden et al., 2013).

The national standard for firefighters to retain a position within the fire service following a cardiac incident requires 12 metabolic equivalent unites of efforts (METs) (Jahnke, Hyder, Haddock, Jitnarin, Day, & Poston, 2015). Less than 10% of volunteer firefighters meet the recommended 12 METs, with females scoring lower than male counterparts (Jahnke et al., 2012). Sinden et al. (2013) found female firefighters have poorer performance than males in the areas of aerobic and strength during simulated firefighting tasks. A study of female firefighters by Jahnke et al. (2012) also indicated

that 66.7% of female volunteer firefighters classified as nonobese by the body mass index (BMI) standards were found to be obese by body fat. Paying attention to physical fitness and obesity are important factors for retention and job performance in the fire service (Jahnke et al., 2015).

Jahnke et al. (2012), Poston, Haddock, Jahnke, Nattinee, Day, and Daniels (2014), and Sinden et al. (2013) all identified mental health issues among female firefighters as limiting retention. The risk of developing mental health issues is high among firefighters in general (Jahnke et al., 2012). Compared to male firefighters, female firefighters face a significantly higher risk of mental health issues because of an increased level of discrimination (Jahnke et al., 2012). Poston et al. (2014) also discovered discrimination among female firefighters can negatively impact mental health and result in lower retention, supporting the findings of Jahnke et al. (2012).

The negative attitudes of male firefighters towards female firefighters can be a barrier for women entering the fire service (Sinden et al., 2013). Negative attitudes towards women from male counterparts create difficulty in developing a positive work environment and affect the overall job satisfaction of the female firefighter (Sinden et al., 2013). Female firefighters are at risk of higher anxiety, exposure to sexism, lower job association, and higher levels of coworker conflict (Sinden et al., 2013). Another precursor to adverse mental health effects female firefighters face is social exclusion because of exclusion from social activities that their male counterparts participate in (Sinden et al., 2013). The involvement in social relationships and developing new friendships are factors for volunteer motivation and retention (Mano & Giannikis, 2013).

Jahnke et al. (2012) indicated a there is a high priority need to continue research on gender disparities in the fire service, which impacts recruitment and retention.

Mental health. The job functions specific to the fire service can significantly impact the psychological well-being of firefighters (Henderson, Van Hasselt, LeDuc, & Couwels, 2016). Volunteer firefighters' job demands include dealing with death, disaster, risking one's own safety and health, and unpredictability (Huynh et al., 2013). Repeat exposure to traumatic events is a key risk factor for substance abuse and mental disorders in firefighters (Harvey, Milligan-Saville, Paterson, Harkness, Marsh, Dobson, & Bryant, 2015). These psychosocial demands can lead to increased turnover and mental health issues among volunteer firefighters (Huynh et al., 2013).

There has been an increase in the past five years on studies focusing on the impact of mental health issues in the fire service. Mental health issues in the fire service is a phenomenon that can have an impact on any fire department at any time (Finney, Buser, Schwartz, Archibald, & Swanson, 2015). The role of the firefighter has also undergone a transformation from once focusing solely on fire suppression to now responding to potentially traumatic experiences via emergency medical calls and terrorist attacks (Jahnke, Gist, Poston, & Haddock, 2014). This shift in roles leads to an increase in vulnerability for mental health issues in the fire service.

Several studies have emphasized the incidence and impact of stress in firefighters' lives. Gulliver et al. (2015) discovered the high levels of occupational and traumatic stress firefighters face are a precursor with posttraumatic stress disorder, substance abuse, and depression, a finding supported by Henderson et al. (2016). Occupational stress in the

fire service includes exposure to traumatic events, relationships with senior leaders, excessive job demands, and changing roles (Moffitt, Bostock, & Cave, 2014). The rate of mental disorders coupled with substance abuse is high among firefighters (Harvey et al., 2015). Over a third of volunteer firefighters report a concern for depression (Jahnke et.al, 2012). There is a general reluctance among firefighters to seek mental health treatment (Jahnke, Gist, Poston, & Haddock, 2014). Firefighters with untreated mental health issues are more likely to leave the fire service and are at higher risk for suicidal ideation (Hom, Stanley, Ringer, & Joiner, 2016).

The high rates of posttraumatic stress and substance abuse disorders among firefighters are markers for suicide completion (Henderson, Van Hasselt, LeDuc, & Couwels, 2016). Volunteer firefighters are less likely to seek mental health services than career firefighters (Hom, Stanley, Ringer, & Joiner, 2016), which is especially important because suicide among firefighters is three times more likely to occur compared to other occupations (Gulliver et al., 2015). Firefighters with longevity are more likely to seek mental health services to deal with job stressors than firefighters with only a few years of experience (Hom, Stanley, Ringer, & Joiner, 2016), suggesting that retention is also important for firefighters' mental health. A qualitative study by Jahnke, Gist, Poston, and Haddock (2014) also indicated that firefighters do not feel comfortable with outside mental professionals and have a lack of confidence in outsiders understanding their experiences.

Work-life balance. Challenges to retention firefighters face include balancing careers, additional training hours for certifications, higher call volumes, and family life

(NVFC, 2016). Cowlshaw, Birch, McLennan, and Hayes (2014) noted competing demands between family and the demands of the fire service might influence a volunteer firefighter's decision to disengage. Over 41 million paid workers serving outside organizations as volunteers face the challenge of balancing the needs of the volunteer organization and home life needs (Ching-Fu & Yu, 2014). The shift from single to dual earning couples in the United States is a contributing challenge for work-life balance for volunteer firefighters (Cowlshaw, Birch, McLennan, & Hayes, 2014; NVFC 2016; USFA, 2007). The U.S. workforce consists of 58.5% dual-earning married couples and 70.6% of working mothers with children under the age of 18 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012); in the United States, 70% of volunteer firefighters are married or in a relationship (Huynh et al., 2013).

Cowlshaw, Birch, McLennan, and Hayes (2014) identified the inability to balance volunteer and family commitments as a factor in the decline of volunteer emergency service providers. Volunteers balancing family demands and volunteer obligations are more likely to experience burnout (Ching-Fu & Yu, 2014). The demanding job duties of a volunteer firefighter directly interfere with the volunteer's family life and can become a stressor (Huynh et al., 2013). Invasive work hours contribute to fatigue and stress (Deery & Jago, 2015). The emergencies volunteer firefighters respond to are unpredictable and can interfere with home routines and events (Huynh et al., 2013).

The time conflicts volunteer firefighters face between home and department life can spur turnover intentions (McNamee & Peterson, 2015). Volunteer firefighters unable

to balance the requirements of home and the fire service can suffer from exhaustion and disconnect from the fire service (Huynh et al., 2013). Employees without family support may lack the ability to keep work-family conflicts from interfering at home and at work are at greater risk for turnover (Huffman, Casper, & Payne, 2014).

Deery and Jago (2015) found that members of an organization with heavy workloads who are unable to balance the duties of the organization and family become emotionally exhausted. Emotional exhaustion impacts organizational embeddedness (Deery & Jago, 2015). As the demands an organization places on a volunteer increases, volunteers are more likely to suffer from emotional exhaustion and are at a higher risk of negative psychological and physical impacts (Ching-Fu & Yu, 2014). Younger adults and women without children at home experience the least amount of negative work-family spillover (Deery & Jago, 2015).

Generational factors. Generational factors are also a significant concern in firefighter services. Generations refer to a specific group of individuals with similar ages and shared experiences (Costanza et al., 2012). Having a better understanding of how multigenerational employees cohabitate within an organization can lead to higher levels of retention (Lyons & Kuron, 2014). Generational conflict exists between older and younger employees because of diverse perceptions of work-life balance and work ethics (Cogin, 2012). Placing employees in generational categories offers a method for understanding age specific issues (Pritchard & Whiting, 2014). Significant changes in social shifts and generational differences can impact volunteerism (Warburton, Smith-Merry, & Michaels, 2013).

Generational differences in the workplace can impact organizational commitment, job satisfaction, leadership style, and retention outcomes (Costanza, Badger, Fraser, Severt, & Gade, 2012). Generations refer to a specific group of individuals with similar ages and shared experiences (Costanza et. al., 2012). Volunteer administrators face challenges with managing middle-aged, early career, and youth volunteers differently compared to previous generations (Rogers, Rogers, & Boyd, 2013). Shared generational identity results in similar workplace expectations in the form of psychological contracts (Lyons & Kuron, 2014). A violation of psychological contracts can lead to turnover, lack of commitment, and a negative emotional response (Low, Bordia, & Bordia, 2016; Lyons & Kuron, 2014). The current four categories of generations in the U.S. workforce are Matures, Baby Boomers, Generation Xers, and Millennials (Lyons, Schweitzer, Ng, & Kuron, 2012).

Mature Generation. The Mature Generation generally includes those born prior to the end of World War II in 1945 (Lyons & Kuron, 2014). Another name for this generation is Traditionalists (Cogin, 2012). This generation as a whole has less formal education and tends to be more conservative than later generations (Lyons & Kuron, 2014). Individuals from the Mature Generation have higher levels of commitment to organizations compared to members of other generations (Costanza et al., 2012). Retention issues organizations face with the Mature Generation is because of age-related health issues that interfere with work duties (Tourangeau, Wong, Saari, & Patterson, 2015). Individuals in the Mature Generation also start to disengage when the

psychological contract changes and the employee perceives the organization views retirement for the employee being near term (Low, Bordia, & Bordia, 2016).

Baby Boomers. Baby Boomers include those born between 1945 and 1964 (Lyons & Kuron, 2014). The 66% of volunteers that return to a second year of service are primarily from either the Baby Boomers or Mature Generation group (McBride & Lee, 2012). While there is a decline among the number of volunteer firefighters as a whole, the average age of U.S. volunteer firefighters is also increasing (NVFC, 2016). Baby Boomers have a higher level of comfort working with others and prefer teamwork compared to those in younger generations (Lyons & Kuron, 2014).

Inadequate leadership is one of the top reasons why Baby Boomers leave an organization (Tourangeau et al., 2015). Organizational leaders also face the challenge of a volunteer gap when the Baby Boomers retire. Compared to the Mature Generation, Baby Boomers are more likely to maintain a volunteer role within an organization beyond the standard age of retirement (Tourangeau et al., 2015).

Generation X. Generation Xers include those born between 1965 and 1979 (Lyons & Kuron, 2014). The Generation Xers are more likely to have grown up with single parents balancing work and family, or with parents both working and would share child-care demands (Schullery, 2013). Individuals belonging to this group are independent, more competitive, and self-reliant compared to the Baby Boomer group (Schullery, 2013). Compared to the Baby Boomers, Generation Xers have a greater preference for working by themselves over serving as a team (Lyons & Kuron, 2014). Generation Xers also have lower levels of organizational commitment compared to older

generations (Costanza et al., 2012). There is also a decrease in organizational loyalty among Generation Xers compared to older generations (Tourangeau et al., 2015).

Generation Xers place a high value on having flexibility with hours of service and work-life balance (Tourangeau et al., 2015).

Millennials. Millennials include those born in 1980 or after (Lyons & Kuron, 2014). Turnover among Millennials is higher to those of older generations (Costanza et al., 2012). Some organizations invest large amounts of resources to retain and engage Millennials and are unsuccessful because of a lack of recognition for generational differences (Schullery, 2013). Another name for the Millennial group is Generation Y (Tourangeau et al., 2015). Newer generations of volunteers often lack time or interest in volunteering (Rogers, Rogers & Boyd, 2013). Cugin (2012) indicated Millennials have a higher turnover rate compared to other generations, with the average employed by seven different organizations over a span of 10 years.

Millennials place high value on work-life balance and are more apt to choose lifestyle over career decisions (Lyons, Schweitzer, Ng, & Kuron, 2012). The values of Millennials are significantly different from the Baby Boomers and Generational Xers (Schullery, 2013). The Millennial generation not only looks different than older generations, but there is also a difference in thinking and behavior (Cugin, 2012).

Millennials tend to be more self-centered, have higher self-esteems, and experience higher levels of anxiety and depression compared to older generations (Lyons & Kuron, 2014). Millennials place greater value on trust, dependability, dedication, and feedback (Lyons & Kuron, 2014).

Organizational climate and commitment. The exploration of organizational climate is important for leaders seeking to improve volunteer retention. An environment that fosters civil and respectful behaviors contributes to greater organizational commitment and psychological contracts (Paull & Omari, 2015). Bullying, violence and other negative behaviors among colleagues leads to high turnover (Paull & Omari, 2015; Tourangeau et al., 2015).

Newcomers. New volunteers lacking satisfaction with organizational climate are likely to leave an organization and seek volunteer opportunities elsewhere (Waters & Bortree, 2012). Newcomer turnover is a financial burden to an organization (Smith, Callan, Terry, & Smith, 2012). The highest risk of turnover among newcomers occurs during the first 3 to 6 months (Smith, Callan, Terry, & Smith, 2012). The quality of experiences a newcomer faces in the first few months is a major factor in determining retention and organizational commitment (Smith, Callan, Terry, & Smith, 2012).

Organizational commitment refers to how involved an individual is with an organization, how strongly an individual identifies with an organization, and an individual's level of desire to stay connected to the organization (Salleh, Amin, Muda, & Abi Sofian Abdul Halim, 2013). The greater level of identification with a social group an individual has the less chance of turnover exists (Smith, Callan, Terry, & Smith, 2012). The loss of community feeling within an organization can also affect retention among volunteer firefighters (NVFC, 2016; USFA, 2007).

Job Satisfaction. Volunteer firefighters' express lower levels of job satisfaction compared to career firefighters (Jahnke et al., 2012). Jahnke et al. (2012) indicated only

38.5% of volunteer firefighters surveyed reported high levels of job satisfaction. The job duties of a volunteer can affect retention (McBride & Lee, 2012). Employees that find work dissatisfying are at greater risk of leaving the organization for a better opportunity (Iqbal & Hashmi, 2015). Older generations feeling ineffective in meeting organizational goals are more likely to leave the organization (McBride & Lee, 2012). Public sector employees have a lower level of job satisfaction compared to those in nonprofit or private industry (Jernigan & Beggs, 2015). Jernigan and Beggs (2015) indicated frequent criticism from media, elected officials, and community groups as reason for lower levels of satisfaction among the public sector. Poor leadership and management styles can also impact levels of job satisfaction and retention among volunteer firefighters (NVFC, 2016; USFA, 2007).

Retention Strategies

The loss of organizational talent can have a negative impact on the success of an organization (Mandhanya, 2015). Member retention reduces financial burdens from turnover, ensures consistent quality service and larger pools of talent to transition into leadership roles (Qazi, Khalid, & Shafique, 2015). The USFA (2015b) indicated fire organizations active in addressing retention issues witness a resurgence in volunteerism. Retention among volunteers is not a given, organizational leadership must facilitate strategies for retention (McBride & Lee, 2012). Developing retention strategies based on generational needs is also of strategic importance (Cogin, 2012). The high job demands of the fire service creates a need for implementing strategies for adequate resources for support is important for retention (Huynh et al., 2013).

Leadership and job satisfaction. Strong leadership in volunteer fire service organizations is key for recruiting and retaining volunteer firefighter (USFA, 2007). Retention and organizational commitment is higher among employees that feel leadership has a concern for employee welfare and appreciates employee efforts (Iqbal & Hashmi, 2015). The satisfaction a volunteer has with his or her supervisor is predictive of retention (McBride & Lee, 2012). Poor leadership and supervisory management can lead to disengagement (Schullery, 2013). Volunteers view effective leadership as a strong resource and reason for positive retention (Cowlshaw, Birch, McLennan, & Hayes, 2014).

It is important for leaders to understand how empowerment leads to motivation and retention (Iqbal & Hashmi, 2015). Sheth (2016) indicated to increase retention leadership needs to understand the psychological contracts of employees and ensure expectations are met. Training leadership to empower the workforce and promote job satisfaction can lead to higher levels of work engagement and retention (Iqbal & Hashmi, 2015).

Nonwage benefits and stipends for job satisfaction. Nonwage benefits are motivators for employee retention (Juurikkala & Lazareva, 2012). Some examples of nonwage benefits include housing, recreation, and medical (Juurikkala & Lazareva, 2012). Environmental factors of the workplace are also significant nonwage benefits in job satisfaction and retention (Mandhanya, 2015). Offering a proper work environment and flexible schedules can lead to an increase in job satisfaction (Mandhanya, 2015). Organizations offering professional development and training have higher rates of job

satisfaction and retention among volunteers (McBride & Lee, 2012; Cowlshaw, Birch, McLennan, & Hayes, 2014).

Creating a fun environment is one nonwage benefit that has been successful for increasing engagement among Millennials (Schullery, 2013). Examples of efforts successful organizations use to retain Millennials include adding on-site pool tables, volleyball pits, rock-climbing walls, and hosting sports leagues for members (Schullery, 2013). One limitation to creating a fun environment for volunteer retention is that older generations with limited financial resources have higher motivation from stipends than environment (McBride & Lee, 2012).

Generational consideration. The characteristics of different generations are important factors for leadership to consider for retention of future volunteers. The Millennial generation thrives from receiving immediate and frequent direct feedback on job performance (Tourangeau et al., 2015). Money is not the main motivator for Millennials (Sheth, 2016). Performance incentives and opportunities for career advancements are two key retention factors among Millennials (Tourangeau et al., 2015).

Members from the Generation X category view paid educational opportunities as an incentive for retention (Tourangeau et al., 2015). Making the investment to fund professional development among the Generation Xers as a retention strategy can lead to strong replacements for the aging Baby Boomers (Tourangeau et al., 2015).

One method to balance the generational differences between Millennials and the older generations is to offer a two-way mentoring program (Schullery, 2013; Tourangeau et al., 2015). Mentoring in general has a positive impact on retention for both younger

and older generations (McBride & Lee, 2012). A two-way mentoring program works best when organizational leadership recognizes the Millennial's expertise with technology and pairs them with a seasoned employee (Schullery, 2013). The older employee provides a shelter to the newcomer and serves as a navigator towards success (Schullery, 2013). The Millennial employee benefits the older employee by transferring knowledge of technology expertise to older employees who may struggle to embrace technology tools in the workplace (Schullery, 2013). The pairing of the Millennial and the older generation employee can be beneficial for both the employees and the organization as a whole.

Physical challenges. A need to increase physical fitness among volunteers is evident with only 10% of volunteer firefighters being able to meet the recommended METs to be eligible for position retention (Jahnke et al., 2012). Jahnke et al, (2012) indicated the METs scores for females were lower than males and the physical strain female firefighters face is a barrier for retention. Only 10% of female volunteer firefighters rate themselves as having excellent health (Jahnke et al., 2012). Implementing standard procedures for firefighter health and fitness and requiring annual fitness assessments are two methods successful fire service organizations use to increase physical health for job retention (Perroni, Guidetti, Cignitti, & Baldari, 2014).

Improving fitness among volunteer firefighters for retention includes offering firefighters access to gym equipment during free time and availability to quality training sessions (Perroni, Guidetti, Cignitti, & Baldari, 2014). Workout programs that include high-intensity cardiovascular and circuit-training are the most effective for firefighters (Perroni, Guidetti, Cignitti, & Baldari, 2014). Firefighters who train at a gym located

inside a fire station make significant improvements compared to those without in-house equipment and training (Perroni, Guidetti, Cignitti, & Baldari, 2014). Two weaknesses with the study recommendations are the financial ability for fire service organizations to fund in-house gym equipment and the assumption volunteer firefighters have the additional time to work out.

Mental health. Placing an emphasis on services for mental health wellness in the fire service is important for retention (Hom, Stanley, Ringer, & Joiner, 2016). Exposures to critical incidents and chronic stress among first responders place them at greater risk for mental issues (Donnelly, Chonody, & Campbell, 2014). Psychological empowerment reduces turnover within organization and leads to organizational commitment (Iqbal & Hashmi, 2015). Members of an organization with high levels of self-determination can positively impact other stakeholder and the organization as a whole (Iqbal & Hashmi, 2015).

Firefighters needing, but not seeking mental health services, cite reputation and embracement as concerns for not getting treatment (Hom, Stanley, Ringer, & Joiner, 2016). Volunteer firefighters are also less likely to seek mental health treatment compared to full-time firefighters because of external career commitments limiting the ability (Hom, Stanley, Ringer, & Joiner, 2016). To reduce the negative connotation of seeking mental health treatment some fire service organizations create a culture that reduces the stigma (Hom, Stanley, Ringer, & Joiner, 2016). To encourage a culture of healthy engagement it is important for leadership to develop policies promoting positive help-seeking behaviors, offer a supportive culture for disclosure without the fear of

recourse, and provide permission for firefighters to seek treatment while maintaining departmental membership (Henderson, Van Hasselt, LeDuc, & Couwels, 2016).

It is important for the retention of the fire service for leaders to collaborate with mental health professionals to offer in-house services and to take a proactive stance on mental health issues (Henderson, Van Hasselt, LeDuc, & Couwels, 2016). Mental health resources should be available to both the firefighter and family members. In-house trainings facilitated by mental health professionals on mental health risk factors, support groups and local resources is also beneficial in addressing mental health issues among firefighters (Henderson, Van Hasselt, LeDuc, & Couwels, 2016).

Work-life balance. Volunteers must balance the needs of home and volunteer organizations (Ching-Fu & Yu, 2014). Work-life balance is important for both male and female volunteers. Johnson and Tunheim (2016) indicated females are committed and willing to take on leadership roles as long as the roles do not interfere with family commitments. One method for organizational leaders to reduce the challenges volunteers face with work-life balance is to implement strategies to foster family support (Huffman, Casper, & Payne, 2014). The support volunteer firefighters receive from family and friends can reduce burnout (Huynh et al., 2013). The family unit of an employee can influence career decisions on retention through encouragement or discouragement (Huffman, Casper, & Payne, 2014).

One method to increase family support for the purpose of work-life balance is to implement strategies that benefit family directly (Huffman, Casper, & Payne, 2014). Examples of efforts successful organizations use to engage family support for retention is

to create new employee orientation programs that include family members, host social events that are family friendly and inclusive, offer websites highlighting nonwage benefits and programs benefiting the family, and distribute satisfaction surveys to significant other to identify problem areas (Huffman, Casper, & Payne, 2014).

Recruitment. Another strategy for creating a positive work-life balance is for an organization is to recruit more volunteers to relieve the conflicting demands of different volunteers (Mano & K. Giannikis, 2013). To improve turnover rates among new recruits, recruitment of new volunteers should focus on volunteers with altruistic drives versus volunteers motivated by individualistic concerns (Mano & K. Giannikis, 2013).

Recruiting young adult volunteers with a history of voluntary work in high school can lead to a team of volunteers with prosocial behaviors and increase retention (Christoph, Gniewosz, & Reinders, 2014). Older generations with a history of volunteering are also more likely to stay engaged (McBride & Lee, 2012). Volunteers with greater levels of education are also more likely to remain a member of the organization served (McBride & Lee, 2012).

Organizational climate and commitment. As mentioned previously, the highest risk of turnover occurs during the first three to six months of onboarding (Smith, Callan, Terry, & Smith, 2012). Offering an initial orientation and training to new volunteers can lead to higher retention (McBride & Lee, 2012). The Millennial generation thrives in an environment that provides guidance and support by strong leaders (Tourangeau et al., 2015).

Another method for engaging newcomers is to promote socialization in public service values (Andrews, 2016). Promoting socialization can include developing a formal mentoring program, engaging new members in training, the inclusion of members in social events, and providing an overview of the organization's goals, mission, and objectives (Andrews, 2016). To foster social acceptance and friendships, engaging volunteers in activities with other volunteers is important (McBride & Lee, 2012).

Job satisfaction. Creating an organizational climate that promotes job satisfaction is another importance factor for retention (Iqbal & Hashmi, 2015). Organizations that allow employees to have a fair amount of control in how to perform job duties are more likely to have satisfied employees (Bowling, Khazon, Meyer, & Burrus, 2015). Creating positive work environments can also increase job satisfaction. Creating an environment where members of an organization cooperatively eat together can increase team unity and satisfaction (Kniffin, Wansink, Devine, & Sobal, 2015). Eating together fosters increased communication among team members that might not normally talk (Kniffin, Wansink, Devine, & Sobal, 2015). While eating together is a common trait among career firefighters, volunteer organizations can also plan shared meals. Organizations successful in facilitating communal eating rooms also encourage family members to join in the mealtime (Kniffin, Wansink, Devine, & Sobal, 2015).

Poor organizational reputation is another factor identified as a risk for employee disengagement (Schullery, 2013). Organizations can develop a poor reputation from failing to address negative workplace behavior. Negative workplace behaviors can impact volunteer retention (Paull & Omari, 2015). Organizations can reduce negative workplace

environments by developing policies outlining acceptable and nonacceptable behaviors (Tourangeau et al., 2015). Consequences of violators should be explicit. Mentoring programs can also help to reduce negative workplace environments leading to turnover. Mentoring programs can assist in developing a positive organizational environment (Tourangeau et al., 2015), which in turn contributes to greater organizational commitment and psychological contract (Paull & Omari, 2015).

Conceptual Framework

The understanding of theory allows scholars to gain a different perspective of the world, solve problems blocking scientific progress, and creates newly identified solutions (Wiesenfeld & Brockner, 2012). Employee turnover has been a focus of interest to scholars for decades and continues to be an area of interest (Hancock, Allen, Bosco, McDaniel & Pierce, 2013). Stakeholder theory is one way for volunteer fire service organizations to improve organizational effectiveness. Researchers using stakeholder theory look to improve the functioning of an organization by developing strong relationships with internal stakeholders (Maier, 2015). Stakeholder theory focuses on creating value for stakeholders to manage an organization (Freeman, Harrison, Wicks, Parmar & DeColle, 2010).

Stakeholder theory. The conceptual framework supporting this research is Edward Freeman's (2010) stakeholder theory, which will help to explore retention strategies. Stakeholders are in every type of organizations (Girard & Sobczak, 2012; Tang & Tang, 2012). Stakeholders are internal and external groups and/or individuals that can impact organizational success, with the organization also having an impact on

the stakeholder (Freeman, 2010; Schlierer, Werner, Signori, Garriga, von WeltzienHoivik, Rossem, & Fassin, 2012). Internal stakeholders include employees and leadership, while external stakeholders include those external parties the organization has an impact on (Girard & Sobczak, 2012; Tang & Tang, 2012).

The work of Freeman (2010) is continued by Ting and Tang (2012) and Girard and Sobczak (2012), claiming both internal and external stakeholders have an investment and benefit in the organization. Relationships between stakeholders and the organization can be beneficial for developing strategic resources for business success (Girard & Sobczak, 2012; Tang & Tang, 2012). Integrating stakeholders early in organizational strategy planning and decision-making can assist with the elimination of barriers to social initiatives (Delgado-Ceballos, Aragon-Correa, Ortiz-de-Mandojana & Rueda-Manzannares, 2012).

Stakeholder theory provides an explanation for organizational success and stakeholder support on the premise leaders base actions on the interest of stakeholders over self-serving agendas (Harrison & Wicks, 2013). As mentioned earlier, key concepts underlying the theory are (a) stakeholder value, (b) mutual interests, and (c) stakeholder relationships (Hörisch, Freeman, & Schaltegger, 2014). Under the concept of stakeholder theory, if an organization neglects a stakeholder group, the group can impact the organization negatively (Padgett, Cheng & Parekh, 2013). Freeman et al. (2010) and Freeman, Harrison, Wicks, Parmar, and DeColle (2010) indicated an organization should serve all individuals who have a stake in the organization, and the existence of the organization is dependent upon the support of the stakeholder group. Organizational

leaders using the principals of stakeholder theory can maximize organizational performance by actively meeting the needs of stakeholders (Baird, Geylani, & Roberts, 2012; Freeman, 2010; Freeman, Harrison, Wicks, Parmar, & DeColle, 2010).

One limitation to stakeholder theory is a disregard for the amount resources needed to fulfill the expectations of stakeholders (Braganza, Stebbings, & Ngosi, 2013). The fire service depends on external stakeholder support to attain financial support for resources. One method for overcoming the limitation for additional resources is to engage external stakeholders. Eichenthal (2013) indicated fully engaging stakeholders in the daily operations of public service organizations is one method for leveraging taxpayer support for additional resources. Another opposition to stakeholder theory indicated by Hasnas (2013) is the use of the theory being confusing in research and the possibility of it being a normative theory. Derry (2012) disagreed with Hasnas (2013), indicating confusion about stakeholder theory is a result of the theory being mischaracterized in print and online articles.

Alternative theories. As applied to this study, stakeholder theory is one possible lens for viewing and understanding specific leadership strategies for maintaining volunteer firefighter success (Harrison & Wicks, 2013). Another possible theory for understanding the relationship between volunteer retention and group identity is Henri Tajfel's social identity theory. Zaglia (2013) indicated social identity is an individual's self-concept generated from personal knowledge of belonging to a social group combined with the value the individual places on the group membership. The social identity approach offers a perspective where the aspirations employees have for themselves as

individuals and as members of the group determine prioritization (Strachan, Källander, Asbroek, Kirkwood, Meek, Benton, & Hill, 2012). Loi, Chan and Lam (2014) indicated under social identity theory employees are motivated to identify with volunteer organizations. Motivating reasons for commitment include interdependence, social categorization, and intergroup comparisons (Loi, Chan, & Lam, 2014).

Another possible theory to explore the influences on volunteer retention is the Herzberg two-factor theory, also known as motivation-hygiene theory. Fredrick Herzberg's two-factor theory is a theory of motivation (Thibodeaux, Labat, Lee, & Labat, 2015). Herzberg's two-factor theory considers the factors in the workplace leading to job satisfaction and the separate factors leading to dissatisfaction among employees (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959). Yang, Wan, and Fu (2012) indicated under Herzberg's two-factor theory motivators to reduce turnover are career development and empowerment. Lo, Lin, and Hsu (2016) indicated under motivation-hygiene theory motivation factors correlate with job satisfaction and hygiene factors correlate with job dissatisfaction. One inference that can be made under motivation-hygiene theory is focusing on motivation factors can increase volunteer firefighter retention. One limitation to Herzberg's two-factor theory is the contradicting interpretation of motivation and hygiene factors between different by different viewers (Lo, Lin, & Hsu, 2016).

A third possible theory to explore volunteer retention is Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory suggesting the actions of an employee is a direct result of conscious choices. The foundation of expectancy theory is the belief that employees believe a relationship exists between the level of effort in the workplace, the performance result of

the effort, and the reward outcome from effort and performance (Lunenburg, 2011). Expectancy theory has a history of usefulness for predicting future employment status (Renko, Kroeck, & Bullough, 2012). Yang, Wan, and Fu (2012) indicated under expectancy theory career growth and recognition as motivators to increase job satisfaction among employees. Renko, Kroeck, and Bullough (2012) indicated one limitation of expectancy theory is that it weakly predicts behavior over time. Another limitation of expectancy theory is a history of receiving criticism for failing to address cognitive biases influencing human choice (Renko, Kroeck, & Bullough, 2012).

Transition

Section 1 included a problem statement outlining the issue of retention in the volunteer fire service and a purpose statement outlining a need for strategies for U.S. fire service leaders to increase volunteer retention. It also included a description of the nature of the study and theoretical framework of the study, as well as its assumptions, limitations, and delimitations. Section 1 concluded with an overview of the literature available, highlighting the current decline of retention in the fire service, factors contributing to retention issues, strategies for addressing retention challenges, an overview of the conceptual framework guiding the study and potential alternative theories.

Section 2 includes providing a description of the researcher role and ethical considerations for the study. It also includes the process for participant eligibility and participation, and techniques for data collection. Section 2 concludes with a discussion on reliability and validity of the study to ensure the case study is creditable, confirmable, and transferable.

Section 3 offers a presentation of the study findings and includes a discussion on how the study may apply to professional practice and implications for social change, suggestions for action and for future research, and personal reflections.

Section 2: The Project

The United States Fire Administration (2007) reported that some fire service organization willing to seek solutions and adapt new strategies have been successful in maintaining membership, despite the challenges with retention among volunteer firefighters. This section presents the purpose of the study and outlines my role as the researcher, sampling techniques, the research method and design, and a description of the participants' role. Section 2 concludes with an overview of techniques to ensure reliability and the validity of the study process.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies volunteer fire service leaders use to retain volunteer firefighters. The study participants were five volunteer fire service leaders from Somerset County, New Jersey, who had successfully improved volunteer firefighter retention. This study promotes social change by providing fire service leaders with strategies to retain volunteer firefighters and contribute to a high-quality workforce to serve the public, which is a priority emphasized by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (2013).

Role of the Researcher

I conducted face-to-face, semistructured interviews with volunteer fire service leaders in Somerset County, New Jersey. Interviews allow participants to share in-depth information regarding experiences on a specific topic (Rowley, 2012). Interviews for a case-based study can also lead to identifying leadership strategies to drive policy change (Ruzzene, 2015). Conducting face-to-face, semistructured interviews and administering

open-ended questions is a good method for collecting information from participants (DeFeo, 2013). I developed a well-planned interview that included note-taking and key listening techniques to ensure the capture of important information, which are successful interviewing techniques suggested by Muskat, Blackman, and Muskat (2012).

My research on this topic was informed by serving as a volunteer firefighter for over 10 years. I hoped to understand what methods I could use to increase firefighter retention within my volunteer fire department, as well as that of other volunteer fire departments. Furthermore, I have other connections in the volunteer fire service from across the United States that are seeking ways to retain volunteer firefighters. Having a personal relationship with the topic also facilitates easier dissemination of the findings to stimulate future research. O'Reilly and Parker (2013) indicated diverse opinions on issues can stimulate debate and the progress future qualitative research.

Maintaining ethics and professionalism is important to U.S. fire services (USFA, 2012), and in research (Department of Health, Education, and Welfare [DHEW], 1979). To ensure an ethical platform, I used the three basic ethical principles found in the Belmont Report:

1. respect for a person – treating all participants as autonomous agents and providing protection to persons with diminished autonomy are methods for showing respect for all participants.
2. beneficence, which includes making an effort to do no harm to participants and maximizing all possible benefits while minimizing possible harms; and
3. justice, which deals with the sense of fairness and entitlement (DHEW, 1979).

DHEW (1979) indicated an injustice takes place when a person does not receive an entitlement without good reason or during the unduly imposing of a burden. As I conducted my research, I reflected on these three principles to continuously treat all participants with respect. I secured all identifiable information to minimize potential harm.

Purposeful sampling, also known as convenience sampling, can create a potential for bias (Olsen, Orr, Bell, & Stuart, 2013). Convenience sampling occurs when a researcher selects sample because the site is the most convenient for the researcher to include in the study (Olsen et al., 2013). To avoid a personal bias of convenience sampling in this study, I used the methods suggested by Olsen et al. (2013). Olsen et al. (2013) indicated a need to conduct an evaluation of eligibility criteria for sites and to continue the recruiting process of sites until the sample size is adequate for answering the research question. Another concern for potential bias is with assumptions (Martin & Parmar, 2012).

Understanding personal biases and assumptions can strengthen research outcomes. It is important for a researcher to identify underlying assumptions to interpret research properly (Kirkwood & Price, 2013). Kirkwood and Price (2013) indicated failing to recognize assumptions could cause research results to be questionable. Maintaining a reflective diary of a researcher's personal contributions and responses is one method for self-awareness of assumptions during the research process (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013). I therefore used a reflective diary to create a reflexive

account of my experiences as the researcher and to track personal interests that can affect the research, as recommended by Houghton et al. (2013).

I selected case-based reasoning because this aligned with the focus of my study to provide an in-depth view of strategies fire service leaders can use to retain volunteer firefighters. Researchers using a qualitative case study design explore the actual issue as illustrated by the cases while retaining a real-world perspective (Yin, 2014). Researchers use case-based reasoning to identify leadership methods and to assist with driving policy change (Ruzzene, 2015). In a phenomenological design, a researcher attempts to understand the participants' lived experiences of a phenomenon, which was not the intent of this study (Bourne, 2015; Moustakas, 1994), so I rejected this alternative design.

Participants

A purposeful sample included five volunteer fire service officers in Somerset County, New Jersey. The focus of the sample size should not be on the number of participants, but on the sample adequacy; the number of purposive samples in qualitative research is adequate when the sample size answers the research question (DeFeo, 2013; Olsen, Orr, Bell, & Stuart, 2013; O'Reilly & Parker, 2013; Yin, 2014). Yin (2014) indicated the interviews of key organizational stakeholders can provide a holistic dataset. A participation criterion was therefore that the fire service officers for included in the study had to have successful strategies for volunteer firefighter retention. I obtained the names of potential participants from personal contacts made at national fire service conferences and professional fire association events.

Planning the design and relationship with participants is key to developing a quality and transparent qualitative study (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). Developing a professional and safe relationship with participants can be done by following procedures and regulations for research (DuBois, Beskow, Campbell, Dugosh, Festinger, Hartz, & Lidz, 2012). To develop a working relationship with participants, I reached out with an invitation by phone and a follow-up email. The email to prospective participants included information on informed consent and interview protocols. A sample copy of the informed consent is in Appendix A, and the interview protocol is in Appendix B of this study. I also gave email and telephone reminders before the interviews.

Several methods were used to maintain professionalism during this study. Siu, Hung, Lam, and Cheng (2013) recommended maintaining a professional relationship using a personal telephone invitation and a follow-up reminder as effective for obtaining a valid response rate for a study on job satisfaction. Participants included in this study received before and after confirmations of their participation, the interview questions, and the consent form.

Research Method and Design

Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore potential strategies to improve retention in the fire service. Using a qualitative method of study allows researchers to explore the connection among various issues to understand the current phenomenon in a real-life context (Ruzzene, 2015). One advantage of selecting a qualitative method over a quantitative or mixed method of research is the data that

participants can offer to answer research questions (Dominik & Gluesing, 2013). Another advantage of selecting a qualitative method for this study over quantitative and mixed methods is the flexibility of relevant findings (Myers, 2013; Yin, 2014). Qualitative studies provide an opportunity for the researcher to engage readers by storytelling through both data and theory narratives (Bansal & Corley, 2012).

Neither a quantitative or mixed-method of research was appropriate for this study. Researchers use quantitative methods to examine the relationship and differences among variables or the cause and effect, which was not the purpose of this study (Watkins, 2012). A quantitative method also does not allow for exploration of strategies within a given case (Bansal & Corley, Yin, 2014), which was important for this study. The use of a qualitative method would be appropriate for studying participant views and human behavior (Myers, 2013; Yin, 2014). Quantitative research also does not include open-ended interview questions for the investigation into strategies, unlike qualitative research (Bansal & Corley, 2012; Elingsson & Brysiewicz, 2012).

Research Design

I deployed a case study design for this study. Researchers use case study designs to provide a persistent form of analysis from diverse sources (Ruzzene, 2015; Yin, 2014), and to provide an in-depth understanding of a certain phenomenon (Dresch, Lacerda, & Cauchick Miguel, 2015). Case studies are also ideal for analysis of real-life analysis (Conaty, 2012). Researchers using a qualitative case study design explore the actual issue as illustrated by the cases while retaining a real-world perspective (Yin, 2014). Researchers use case-based reasoning to identify leadership methods and to assist with

driving policy change (Ruzzene, 2015). Qualitative techniques found in a case study design allow researchers of business problems to gain an understanding on issues that remain unclear in quantitative research (Reddy, 2015). Using case-based reasoning aligned with the purpose of my study to obtain an in-depth view of successful strategies that fire service leaders use to retain volunteer firefighters.

To ensure data saturation, I conducted interviews and collected documentation until I had adequate information to answer the research question. Data saturation through the collection of adequate sources strengthens the validity and reliability of qualitative research (DeFeo, 2013; Fusch & Ness, 2015; O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). I also used member checking to ensure data saturation because this is critical for study validity and ensuring rigor in qualitative research, as noted by Harper and Cole (2012), Houghton et al. (2013), and Reilly (2013). Houghton et al. (2013) indicated that member checking provides participants the opportunity to read interview transcriptions and verify data accuracy. Member checking allows the correction of errors in interpretation and facts (Houghton et al., 2013; Reilly, 2013).

I rejected phenomenological, grounded theory, and ethnography designs as not appropriate for this study. In a phenomenological design, a researcher attempts to understand the participants' lived experiences of a phenomenon, which was not the intent of this study (Bourne, 2015; Moustakas, 1994). In a grounded theory design, researchers study shared group experiences and generate one or more new theories, which was not the intent of this study (Watkins, 2012). Researchers use ethnography for understanding

individual cultures, which was not the intent of this study (Watkins, 2012). Because these designs were not suitable, I rejected them,

Population and Sampling

The population of the U.S. volunteer fire service consists of more than 780,000 volunteer firefighters (NVFC, 2016). The best method for this study was purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is a selection method by which the participants are not random (Olsen, Orr, Bell, & Stuart, 2013). Masso, McCarty and Kitson (2014) indicated in purposive sampling participant selection stems from samples with rich experiences to answer the research question. Purposive sampling can increase study validity and provide rich information (Robinson, 2014).

The target population consisted of five volunteer fire service officers from Somerset County, New Jersey. The objective is to identify what strategies fire service leaders use to retain volunteer firefighters for sustainability. Rao (2012) indicated determining the appropriate sample size is an important part of study design. The focus of the purposeful sample size should be on the sample adequacy, not the number of participants. If the richness of the information from the participants is adequate in answering the research question data saturation is reached (DeFeo, 2013; Olsen et al., 2013; O'Reilly & Parker, 2013; Yin, 2014).

The process for selecting study participants is vital in qualitative research (Rowley, 2012). Robinson (2014) indicated the use of inclusion and exclusion criteria is important to delineate a sample universe. The population for this study was volunteer fire service leaders from Somerset County, New Jersey who had successfully increased

volunteer firefighter retention. Conducting interviews of the main organizational stakeholders can provide a holistic dataset (Yin, 2014).

I conducted face-to-face, semistructured interviews and collected documentation to explore strategies fire service leaders used to retain volunteer firefighters. DeFeo (2013) indicated face-to-face interviews with open ended questions as effective methods for information collection. Using interviews in research allows participants to provide rich responses to research questions (Rhee, Zwar, & Kemp, 2012).

To ensure data saturation, I also collected historical documents, standard operating procedures, policies, and other documents mentioned by the participants during the interview. The collection of documentation coupled with interviews strengthens the validity and reliability of qualitative research (DeFeo, 2013; Fusch & Ness, 2015; O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). I also used member checking to ensure data saturation. Member checking provides participants the opportunity to verify interview transcriptions are factual, and there are no errors in interpretations (Houghton et al., 2013). Member checking ensures rigor in qualitative research and is critical for validity (Harper & Cole, 2012; Houghton et al., 2013; Reilly, 2013).

Ethical Research

Ethics, integrity, and professionalism is an essential foundation in U.S. fire services (USFA, 2012), and in research (DHEW, 1979). To ensure an ethical approach to this study, I followed the three basic ethical principles found in the Belmont Report: respect for a person, beneficence, and justice (DHEW, 1979).

The ethical principle of respect deals with autonomy, which is an aspect of personal will (Schaefer, Kahane, & Savulescu, 2014). To ensure autonomy in the study, I informed participants that participation in the study was voluntary and they could withdraw at any time without fear of any relationship changing. I informed participants that they could withdraw from the study in the invitation (Appendix C) and in the consent form (Appendix A). Participants also received the explanation and option to withdraw during the interview process. All participants received an explanation of the option to withdraw via phone, email, and the consent form. Participants received information any form of communication for the option of withdrawal is acceptable.

The consent form also informed participants there were no incentives for participating beyond the results contributing to positive social change. The results of the study are designed to contribute to positive social change by offering fire service leaders with effective strategies for improving the retention of volunteer firefighters.

To minimize the potential harm to participants, I secured all identifiable information. I kept data secure by keeping all research records in a locked file where I only have access. I am using an encrypted external hard drive solely under my control to contain for five years the case study database, data from interviews, and document analysis. I asked participants for consent to record the interview. I erased the recording after the interview and transcription took place. Individual participants received a unique identifier for use in the database to ensure confidentiality. I used a catalog and coding system for capturing and maintaining study data. Any data that had the potential to identify a participant were coded.

Finally, I sought approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to comply with ethical requirements, which was granted (#10-20-16-0471970; expiration October 19, 2017). The study appendices relevant to ethical research includes the informed consent form. The study Table of Contents also indicates where to find the informed consent form.

Data Collection Instruments

The main data collection instrument in a case study is the researcher (Houghton et al., 2013; Leedy & Ormond, 2013). The skills a researcher can offer as the collection instrument can affect the quality of the results vitally (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013; Rowley, 2012; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The collection process for the study included a face-to-face, semistructured interview with open-ended questions. A face-to-face, semistructured interview with open-ended questions is a good instrument for data collection (DeFeo, 2013).

Interviews allow participants to share rich information regarding experiences on a specific topic (Rowley, 2012). Appendix B includes protocol procedures for data collection and provides the interview questions. Muskat, Blackman, and Musakt (2012) indicated developing a well-planned interview that includes note-taking and key listening techniques to capture data is important for conducting interviews.

I also collected documents participants mentioned during the interview. Collecting documents as a second form of data collection can provide a more accurate and convincing case study (Yin, 2014). The collection of documentation strengthens the validity and reliability of qualitative research (DeFeo, 2013; Fusch & Ness, 2015;

O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). I kept all documents in a secure file, and only I have access to the data. After five years per the Walden University policy, I will destroy all documents.

Another method for strengthening the reliability and validity of the data collection is through data saturation (DeFeo, 2013; Fusch & Ness, 2015; O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). I used the process of member checking as a method to strengthen data collection. As previously mentioned, member checking in research is critical for study validity and ensuring rigor in qualitative research (Harper & Cole, 2012; Houghton et al., 2013, Reilly, 2013). Member checking will allow all participants the opportunity to review interview transcriptions and identify inaccurate information (Houghton et al., 2013). To provide participants with an understanding of member checking, a description of member checking was included in the invitation to participants (Appendix C).

Data Collection Technique

As the primary data collection instrument, a researcher can use skills to improve the quality of results (Rowley, 2012). For example, developing a well-planned interview is critical for data collection (Doody & Noonan, 2013; Muskat, Blackman, & Muskat, 2012). Yin (2014) recommended that researchers conducting interviews implement an interview protocol. I therefore followed this protocol when collecting the interview data:

1. Identified potential participants via personal contact at national fire service conferences and professional fire service association events.
2. Solicited potential participants for participation in the study via an initial email.

3. After receiving participant willingness to participate in the study, I emailed the participants providing an overview of the study, including interview questions and the consent form.
4. Confirmed a date, time and location for the interview by phone or email, and answer any relevant follow-up questions.
5. Used the standard interview questions for the study and included a record of any probing questions participants may express.
6. Sent a thank you card to all participants expressing gratitude for participation in the study.
7. Transcribed each interview.
8. Provided participants the opportunity to review the transcriptions for the accuracy of interpretations and factual information.

I followed this protocol procedure to ensure all face-to-face interviews follow the same set-up process (Appendix B).

During the initial contact with participants, I shared a brief overview of the study, requested participation, and provided the interview protocol with interview questions (Appendix B). Once an individual confirmed participation, an appointment for the interview was set, and the consent form (Appendix A) was sent requesting participants read and sign prior to the interview. I asked the participants to scan or email the signed consent form and return before the interview.

An Apple iPhone 6 and MacBook Pro were two devices used for recording each interview. The interview started with an overview of the study and followed the interview

protocol (Appendix B) to ensure consistency. Transcription occurred for each interview following the interview date. Each participant was provided the opportunity to participate in member checking to ensure accuracy of information from the interview. Member checking allows the researcher to take back the ideas from the interview to confirm or gather additional information (Harvey, 2015). Member checking strengthens study results (Houghton et al., 2013; Reilly, 2013). Participants received a copy of the interview transcription as part of the member checking process. The delivery of the transcription was sent via email based on participant preference. Any follow up meetings resulting from member checking took place at a location of convenience for the participant.

Another data collection technique I used was to collect documents participants mentioned during the interview. The use of interviews and document collection allows for triangulation (Heale & Forbes, 2013). Using methodological triangulation in research strengthens the validity and reliability of qualitative research (DeFeo, 2013; Fusch & Ness, 2015; O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). The security of documents in this study remained a priority. I kept all documents locked, with my access only, and the destruction of all documents will occur after five years.

Interviews in research have advantages and disadvantage. Using interviews as a technique to collect data is useful for exploring the experiences of participants (Bell, 2014; Doody & Noonan, 2013; Rowley, 2012). One disadvantage for new researchers conducting interviews is that interview skills grow over time (Doody & Noonan, 2013). To address this disadvantage, inexperienced researchers can consult with other researchers for advice and feedback (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Another disadvantage of

using interviews is the amount of time participants use to share personal experiences (Bell, 2014). Oversharing of personal experiences may also cause the participant to withdraw from the study from fear of publically sharing feelings (Bell, 2014).

Data Organization Technique

The study used interviews and document collection to explore strategies volunteer fire service leaders use for firefighter retention. I organized data using a research journal that included interview questions and participant responses. The use of a research journal can ensure rigor in qualitative studies (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013).

Anonymizing identifying data in research is important for protecting participants (Bell, 2014; Saunders, Kitzinger, & Kitzinger, 2015). I used alphanumeric codes to protect the identity of each participant, such as fire service leader one transcribes to L1. The codes ranged from L1 to L5 to represent the five participants. The research journal included labels with the alphanumeric code to align the notes, nonverbal cues, interview setting, and other pertinent information with the correct participant. I captured thoughts and reflections of the interview within 48 hours of the interview in the research journal, which is important for information retention. (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013).

To maintain the integrity of the study, there is a need to secure all recordings, transcriptions, and supporting documents (Anyan, 2013; Bell, 2014; Leedy & Ormond, 2013). I secured in a locked file cabinet all raw data, transcriptions, and supporting documents, with my access only. The only access to electronic documents is by password. The destruction of all documents will occur after five years. Bell (2014)

indicated the shredding of data a method for protecting the confidentiality and anonymity of participants.

Data Analysis

All forms of narrative inquiry involve an element of analysis and development of themes (Bell, 2014). Systematically reducing the complexity of information is important in qualitative data collection (Glaser & Laudel, 2013). Coding is one technique that has been in use by researchers (Glaser & Laudel, 2013). The process of coding takes place during the entire study, not just at one point in time (Kuckartz (2014). Two software programs to support coding in the qualitative data analysis process are MAXQDA and NVivo (Patton, 2015). Researchers can use MAXQDA and NVivo software to analyze unstructured data, such as interviews (Patton, 2015). Using coding programs can also create an audit trail to enhance the rigor of research (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013).

MAXQDA was the selected software for organization for this study. MAXQDA allows researchers to import interview data and audio files for organization in groups (VERBI GmbH, 2016). MAXQDA allows for flexibility, and the researcher can adjust the coding system to expand or refine information (VERBI GmbH, 2016). Kuckartz (2014) indicated MAXQDA allows researchers to highlight text in different colors and generates systematic summaries by groups. One exclusion for developing themes through coding is with the literature review. Leedy and Ormond (2013) indicated a researcher should not use information from the literature review to code themes, only use literature review information to provide context to the study.

The study included methodical triangulation for analysis. Methodological triangulation involves using more than one source to substantiate validity (Heale & Forbes, 2013; Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013; Patton, 2015). Triangulation can occur using interviews and document collection (Heale & Forbes, 2013). Methodological triangulation strengthens the validity and reliability of the research (DeFeo, 2013; Fusch & Ness, 2015; O'Reilly & Parker, 2013).

The study used semistructured face-to-face recorded interviews through the application of a modified Van Kaam's phenomenological model as a basis to analyze participant data. A modified van Kaam model for analysis can provide rigor in a study (Moustakas, 1994). The van Kaam model will allow the researcher to add to current information while asking new questions about the phenomenon (Frivold, Dale, & Slettebo, 2015; Johansson, Hanson, Runeson, & Wåhlin, 2015). The modified van Kaam approach uses a step approach to collect knowledge of lived experiences among participants (Moustakas, 1994). There are seven steps in the modified van Kaam model (Machtmes et al., 2009). The first step is developing a preliminary listing and grouping (Machtmes et al., 2009; Moustakas, 1994). The second step is to reduce and eliminate unnecessary data. The third step involves clustering and thematizing the invariant constituents. Core themes of the experience come from clustered and labeled constituents (Machtmes et al., 2009). The fourth step includes final identification of the invariant constituents and themes by application (Machtmes et al., 2009; Moustakas, 1994). The deletion of information not relevant to participant experience should occur (Machtmes et al., 2009). The fifth step is to construct an individual textual description and the sixth step

is to construct individual structural description. The final step is to construct a textual-structural description and clarification of the meanings (Machtmes et al., 2009; Moustakas, 1994).

Data analysis consists of examining and categorizing data, which leads to identifying developing themes (Bell, 2014; Yin, 2014). A qualitative method in research requires openness to analysis (Reynolds, 2014). The use of a qualitative analysis software, such as MAXQDA, over manual coding and categorization, will allow the identification of undiscovered themes. The response to interview questions and document collection allowed for the discovery of themes related to the conceptual framework.

Appendix B contains these interview questions:

1. What strategies do you use to retain volunteer firefighters within your organization?
2. What barriers to implementing retention strategies do you face?
3. How do you address implementation barriers?
4. What strategies do you use to retain volunteer firefighters with outside family and career commitments?
5. How do you assess the effectiveness of retention?

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

The term reliability is common in quantitative research. A shift in terms now replaces reliability in qualitative studies with dependability (Reedy, 2015). Reliability is the degree in which procedures in a study would consistently produce similar results by

other researchers (Bell, 2014; Houghton et al., 2013; Reedy, 2015). Yin (2014) indicated consistency by the researcher throughout the study could establish reliability.

To ensure consistency, I followed the interview protocol (Appendix B) during all interviews. Being consistent in research increases the credibility of data and reduces doubt (Svensson & Doumas, 2013). I used a case study database and research journal to document all steps of my study to ensure consistency and credibility. The use of a research journal and documentation of steps in a study provides rigor and credibility in qualitative studies (Cope, 2014; Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013).

Conducting interviews and document collection allows for triangulation (Heale & Forbes, 2013). Using methodological triangulation in research strengthens the validity and reliability of qualitative research (DeFeo, 2013; Fusch & Ness, 2015; Marshall & Rossman, 2014; O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). The use of multiple sources can increase study reliability (Yin, 2014). In addition to interviews with participants, I collected copies of supporting documents.

Member checking is another method to ensure study reliability and rigor in qualitative studies (Harper & Cole, 2012; Houghton et al., 2013; Reilly, 2013). To ensure the credibility and reliability of data, I provided participants the opportunity to review transcriptions and verify data. The process of member checking allows for the identification of any errors to increase reliability (Houghton et al., 2013; Reilly, 2013).

Validity

Bell (2014) indicated validity in research is the overall quality of a study leading to creditable conclusions. Methods to ensure the study validity include using multiple

sources of data, member checking, and a research journal (Reddy, 2015). I included methodological triangulation to validate the findings. I used interviews and document collection as multiple sources of data. The use of multiple sources allows for triangulation and data saturation (Heale & Forbes, 2013). Methodological triangulation strengthens validity (DeFeo, 2013; Fusch & Ness, 2015; Marshall & Rossman, 2014). The use of member checking in the study provided participants the opportunity to review transcriptions and verify data, which ensures validity and data saturation (Harper & Cole, 2012; Houghton et al., 2013; Reilly, 2013). The correction of all errors took place after member checking is complete. The use of a research journal to document the steps of the study provides credibility in qualitative studies (Cope, 2014; Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013).

Transferability is the extent to which study results can transfer to other contexts (Reedy, 2015). Houghton et al. (2013) indicated to determine transferability the study must include a thick description of the original context of the research. Thick descriptions include time, place, culture, and context (Reedy, 2015). The judgment of transferability is the responsibility of the reader (Houghton et al., 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). To ensure transferability, I included in the study descriptions of purposive sampling criteria and interview protocols to enable study replication.

Confirmability is the accuracy of data and is one approach to addressing rigor (Houghton et al., 2013). Using an audit trail and reflexivity are two strategies for confirmability (Cope, 2014; Houghton et al., 2013). I used a research journal throughout the study for reflexivity. I used the analysis software MAXQDA to ensure confirmability

transpires. Confirmability will transpire when there are no new themes in MAXQDA.

Yin (2014) indicated validity occurs when no new themes show.

Transition and Summary

Section 1 includes a problem statement outlining the issue of retention in the volunteer fire service and a purpose statement outlining a need for strategies for U.S. fire service leaders to increase volunteer retention. Following the problem and purpose statement is the nature of the study and theoretical framework of the study. A discussion on assumptions, limitations, and delimitations for the study is in section 1. Section 1 concludes with an overview of the literature available, highlighting the current decline of retention in the fire service, factors contributing to retention issues, strategies for addressing retention challenges, an overview of the conceptual framework guiding the study and potential alternative theories.

Section 2 of the research study includes the plan and purpose for conducting the qualitative case study. Section 2 also provides a description of the researcher role and ethical considerations for the study. It also includes the process for participant eligibility and participation, and techniques for data collection. Section 2 concludes with a discussion on reliability and validity of the study to ensure the case study is credible, confirmable, and transferable.

Section 3 offers a presentation of the study findings, a discussion on how the study may apply to professional practice and implications for change. The ending components include recommendations for future research, and personal reflections.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies volunteer fire service leaders have used to retain volunteer firefighters. The data came from face-to-face, semistructured interviews with five fire service leaders and document review from a volunteer fire department in Somerset County, New Jersey. The interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants, transcribed, and analyzed by theme using a modified van Kaam method of analysis. The goal of the study was to answer the central research question: What strategies do volunteer fire service leaders use to retain volunteer firefighters? I collected data to answer this research question using five interview questions (see Appendix B) that were answered by all five participants.

I analyzed the responses from the interview questions and supporting documents to identify emerging themes. The collected supporting documents included an employee roster, the organization's constitution and bylaws, standard operating guidelines, Length of Service Awards Program (LOSAP) guidelines, and information found on the organization's website.

After data saturation occurred, the data were entered into the analysis software program MAXQDA to identify any additional themes to pinpoint strategies used by fire service leaders to retain volunteer firefighters. Six themes emerged from the coding process: (a) schedule accommodations, (b) nonwage benefits, (c) opportunities for employee success, (d) recognition, (e) family, and (f) recruitment. The emerging themes

affirmed the use of stakeholder theory. Using the findings, I identified successful strategies fire service leaders can apply to increase retention of volunteer firefighters.

Presentation of the Findings

The conceptual framework supporting this research was Freeman's (1984) stakeholder theory. Stakeholder theory offers a possible explanation for organizational success and stakeholder support based upon the premise that leaders base actions on the interest of stakeholders over self-serving agendas (Harrison & Wicks, 2013). I specifically applied concepts of stakeholder theory to guide my research with fire service leaders on retention strategies.

Data for methodological triangulation for this study were gathered from five semistructured interviews with fire service leaders and a review of supporting industry documentation. Supporting documents included a roster of employees and longevity, constitution and bylaws, current standard operating guidelines, the guidelines for LOSAP, and information from the organization's website. Five interview questions were derived to answer the following research question: What strategies do volunteer fire service leaders use to retain volunteer firefighters? Interviews were recorded with participant consent and then transcribed. Protecting participants through anonymity is important in research (Bell, 2014; Saunders, Kitzinger, & Kitzinger, 2015). To protect each participant, the name of each leader was replaced with L1 through L5 based on the chronological order of their interviews.

Participants and Their Organization

Potential participants for the study were identified via personal contact at national

fire service conferences and fire association events. During introductions at such events, I noted any fire service organization that mentioned they had strong retention. I used the resulting list to search on the Internet for information on each organization and reached out to the one with the most documented information, which was in Somerset County, New Jersey. I then reached out to the chief of the department to obtain permission to conduct the study within the organization and requested a signed letter of cooperation, which was provided.

According to the fire company's website and an internal document that I reviewed, the volunteer fire service organization used in this study was established over eighty years ago for the purpose of protecting property and life from fire. At the time of this study, the organization's website stated that is responsible for protecting an estimated 25,000 citizens. It also responded to an average of 600 calls a year (L1, personal communication, October 22, 2016). The organization had 86 employees on the roster, with 79% having more than one year of service (document 2, October 22, 2016). Table 1 provides a summary of employees and their length of service to the organization (document 2, October 22, 2016).

Table 1

Employee Years of Service at the Study Site

Years of service	# of employees	% of employees within the organization
1 or less	18	21%
2 to 4	28	33%
5 to 10	26	30%
11 to 15	5	6%
16 to 25	3	3%
26 to 34	2	2%
34 or greater	4	5%

Once Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval to conduct the study was granted (approval #10-20-16-0471970, expiration 10/19/2017), I solicited potential participation in the study via an initial email and followed up with a phone call to confirm the date, time and location for the interview. I received a 100% positive response rate from the perspective participants. Prior to conducting the interviews, the consent form (see Appendix A) was reviewed and signed by each participant.

The interviews were conducted in a private meeting room in the organization. Each participant was asked five open-ended questions following the interview protocol (see Appendix B). All five participants answered each question and agreed for the interview to be recorded. At the conclusion of each interview, I inquired about any supporting documents. The supporting documents that I obtained for review included a roster of members with their length of service, the organization's constitution and bylaws, the current standard operating guidelines of the organization, the guidelines for the

Length of Service Awards Program, and review of the organization's website. At the close of each interview, I thanked participants for their participation.

I transcribed the interviews from the recordings and provided participants the opportunity to review the transcriptions for the accuracy of interpretations and factual information. Houghton et al. (2013) indicated providing participants the opportunity to read interview transcriptions and verify data accuracy allows for the correction of errors in interpretation and facts.

Collected data were interpreted using a modified van Kaam method of analysis. Data analysis consists of examining and categorizing data, which leads to identifying developing themes (Bell, 2014; Yin, 2014). Using the modified van Kaam approach involves a step approach to collecting knowledge of lived experiences among participants (Moustakas, 1994). The seven steps in the modified van Kaam model are as follows:

1. Develop a preliminary listing and grouping.
2. Reduce and eliminate unnecessary data.
3. Clustering and thematizing the invariant constituents.
4. Final identification of the invariant constituents and themes by application.
5. Construct an individual textual description
6. Construct individual structural description.
7. Construct a textural-structural description and clarification of the meanings

(Moustakas, 1994).

I entered data into the analysis software MAXQDA to identify any additional themes specific to strategies used by fire service leaders to retain volunteer firefighters.

MAXQDA is a software program used to support coding in the qualitative data analysis process (Patton, 2015). Using coding programs can also create an audit trail to enhance the rigor of research (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013). Yin (2014) indicated reliability can be established through consistency by the researcher throughout the study. To ensure consistency, the pre-established interview protocol (Appendix B) was followed during all interviews. Consistency in research increases the credibility of data and reduces doubt (Svensson & Dumas, 2013). The collection of supporting documentation paired with interviews strengthens the validity and reliability of qualitative research (DeFeo, 2013; Fusch & Ness, 2015; O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). Validity was therefore established by checking all supporting documents, member checking, and presenting all data.

As previously mentioned, six themes emerged from the coding and triangulation process. The findings were used to identify strategies fire service leaders can apply to retain volunteer firefighters through stakeholder collaboration. The themes collected during the interview process are as follows: (a) schedule accommodations, (b) nonwage benefits, (c) opportunities for employee success, (d) recognition, (e) family, and (f) recruitment.

Emergent Theme 1: Schedule Accommodations

The first theme to emerge was the importance of flexibility in scheduling training and duty crew requirements to accommodate the schedules of volunteer firefighters to allow for retention. Accommodating the scheduling needs of employees relates to stakeholder theory by meeting employee needs. Organizational leaders meeting the needs

of stakeholders can maximize organizational performance (Baird, Geylani, & Roberts, 2012). Providing flexibility in scheduling can increase job satisfaction (Mandhanya, 2015), and is of high value for Generation Xers and Millennials (Tourangeau, Wong, Saari, & Patterson, 2015; Lyons, Schweitzer, Ng, & Kuron, 2012). Idris (2014) indicated younger generations have a greater concern for work-life balance and monetary benefits are no longer a sustainable driver for commitment. Work-life balance and flexible hours are also important retention factors among older generations (Kent, 2015).

Bird (2016) indicated most employees want control over their schedules to balance work-life and inflexible employers place a burden on employees which can impede performance. Freeman et al. (2010) recommended that an organization should serve all individuals who have a stake in the organization, and accommodating workplace flexibility can be a robust benefit for reducing retention barriers (Bird, 2016). Implementing flexible scheduling to accommodate employees may assist organizations with recruiting and retaining the best workforce (Idris, 2014).

All five participants recognized the importance of flexible scheduling for training, duty crew assignments and meeting requirements. Participant 3 (L3) indicated restructuring the hours of department requirements to accommodate individuals with outside commitments allows for employee retention (L3, personal communication, October 22, 2016). Participant 1 (L1) indicated offering a variety of options to participate in training, duty crew nights, and meetings is key to overcoming the barrier of outside commitments (L1, personal communication, October 22, 2016). L1 explained:

Those with outside commitments have six different nights they can choose to be here. Let's say they have soccer, baseball, basketball, maybe with their daughter or son, on Tuesday, or Thursday, they can come down here Sunday, Monday, Wednesday or Friday to attend their drill nights, their duty crews and their training. If you know you have two and three different jobs, we have officers such as myself that work the night shift and are available to meet during the day so you can make up your training requirements. You can make up the hours that you don't participate in during the week. (L1, personal communication, October 22, 2016)

Participant 4 (L4) also indicated to accommodate the school and job schedules of employees they offer training on a Sunday (L4, personal communication, October 22, 2016). When it comes to scheduling, Participant 2 (L2) stated, "You try to make things flexible, and if they only have a little bit of time, four hours a week or something, you grab it, which fills the days, it fills the fire trucks, it fills the seats going out the door" (L2, personal communication, October 22, 2016). Participant 5 (L5) indicated the implementation of flexible scheduling benefits the organization by having fire protection coverage every night of the week (L5, personal communication, October 22, 2016).

Emergent Theme 2: Nonwage Benefits

The second theme to emerge was the use of nonwage benefits to retain volunteer firefighters. Nonwage benefits are motivators for employee retention (Juurikkala & Lazareva, 2012). Theme 2 relates to Freeman's (1984) stakeholder theory by offering something of value to employees. Stakeholder theory focuses on creating value for

stakeholders (Freeman, Harrison, Wicks, Parmar & DeColle, 2010). Aligning nonwage benefits with the wants and needs of younger generations organization can reduce turnover (Joyce & Barry, 2016). Nonwage benefits identified by participants include uniforms and branded items, an attractive working environment, professional development opportunities, and camaraderie activities. Table 2 provides a summary of the frequency nonwage benefits were mentioned as a retention strategy during participant interviews (L1, personal communication, October 22, 2016; L2, personal communication, October 22, 2016; L3, personal communication, October 22, 2016; L4, personal communication, October 22, 2016; & L5, personal communication, October 22, 2016).

Table 2

Nonwage Benefits at the Study Site

Nonwage benefit for retention	Frequency of times mentioned	% of times mentioned by participants
Uniforms and branded items	37	36%
Attractive working environment	11	11%
Professional development opportunities	39	38%
Camaraderie activities	16	16%

Attractive work environment. Providing employees with a proper work environment can lead to an increase in job satisfaction (Mandhanya, 2015). Creating a workspace that is fun has been successful for engaging Millennials (Schullery, 2013). All participants indicated creating an appealing work environment as a method to retain volunteer firefighters (L1, personal communication, October 22, 2016; L2,

personal communication, October 22, 2016; L3, personal communication, October 22, 2016; L4, personal communication, October 22, 2016; & L5, personal communication, eOctober 22, 2016).

L1, indicated creating an environment that encourages volunteer firefighters to hangout was a successful method for retention (L1, personal communication, October 22, 2016). L1 stated:

Our day room is where everybody hangs out. We have very comfortable leather couches, tables with high top chairs where people can sit, people can talk, they can study. If they want to sit at the couches there's Xbox, they can play Xbox because I know nowadays everybody is into these high technology video games.

So for the younger kids that are firefighters we give them Xbox, we give them

Blu-Ray DVD players to watch DVDs on. Large televisions with surround sound.

L5 stated, "We have refreshments, soda, water, popcorn always available in the firehouse. It's a place to get out of the house. It's also a place to come down and hang out with your other friends" (L5, personal communication, October 22, 2016).

L1, L2, L3, L4, and L5 indicated offering volunteer firefighters who are students a quiet place to study and Wi-Fi as effective retention strategies (L1, personal communication, October 22, 2016; L2, personal communication, October 22, 2016; L3, personal communication, October 22, 2016; L4, personal communication, October 22, 2016; & L5, personal communication, October 22, 2016). L1, L4 and L5 claimed offering the use of a washer and dryer to volunteer firefighters increases retention rates among employees who are also students (L1, personal communication, October 22, 2016; L4,

personal communication, October 22, 2016; L5, personal communication, October 22, 2016). Volunteer firefighters using an in-house washer and dryer hang out at the station while clothes are washing and are available to respond to a fire call during that time (L1, personal communication, October 22, 2016; L5, personal communication, October 22, 2016).

L3 indicated changing the work environment to allow volunteer firefighters coming from far away to sleep at the station as an effective retention strategy (L3, personal communication, October 22, 2016). L1 stated, “We have a bunk room for people to stay in overnight for their duty crew, so if they live far away they can still maintain active membership” (L1, personal communication, October 22, 2016). Adding bunkrooms for overnight stays meets the needs of volunteer firefighters who live too far from the organization to respond from home and allows the organization to provide fire protection coverage around the clock (L3, personal communication, October 22, 2016).

Professional development opportunities. Organizations that provide professional development opportunities have higher rates of retention (McBride & Lee, 2012; Cowlshaw, Birch, McLennan, & Hayes, 2014). Millennial employees have a greater interest in meaningful roles over salary and are keen on professional development for career progress (Aruna & Anitha, 2015). Offering free education may have a positive impact on an employee’s desire to work (Carlso, 2015).

L1, L2, L3, L4 and L5 all indicated training as a factor for retention among volunteer firefighters (L1, personal communication, October 22, 2016; L2, personal communication, October 22, 2016; L3, personal communication, October 22, 2016; L4,

personal communication, October 22, 2016; & L5, personal communication, October 22, 2016). L5 indicated all trainings are paid for by the organization (L5, personal communication, October 22, 2016). L2 stated, the organization “probably has better training than most in the county” (L2, personal communication, October 22, 2016). L2 also stated, “guys left here with their training and made a career of it, and said their start here was beneficial to them” (L2e, personal communication, October 22, 2016). L3 claimed training provided by the organization allows employees to become leaders in other organizations (L3, personal communication, eOctober 22, 2016). L1 also stated, “We keep morale high through training and keeping training fresh” (L1, personal communication, October 22, 2016).

Camaraderie activities. Making fun a part of the work environment is another method for employee commitment. Millennials seek a fun work environment (Aruna & Anitha, 2015). Organization sponsored activities allow employees the opportunity to build personal relationships with one another and create a higher level of camaraderie (Joyce & Barry, 2016). Camaraderie driven activities may impact stakeholder engagement (Lu & Roto, 2016). Organizations that offer creative camaraderie activities indicate having higher levels of productivity and commitment (American Society of Engineers, 2015). Organizational events and games keep employees inspired and may result in long-term pride for an employee (Lu & Roto, 2016). Davis (2013) indicated camaraderie activities rank as one of the best aspects in the workplace.

L1, L2, L4 and L5 indicated a number of camaraderie activities being successful for retention. (L1, personal communication, October 22, 2016; L2, personal

communication, October 22, 2016; L4, personal communication, October 22, 2016; & L5, personal communication, October 22, 2016). L1 indicated picnics for different holidays, social gatherings, and dinners are camaraderie activities to keep volunteer firefighters interested (L1, personal communication, October 22, 2016). Employees getting together at the organization to eat and hang out on the weekends ensures a duty crew is ready to respond to a call (L1, personal communication, October 22, 2016; L2, personal communication, October 22, 2016; L4, personal communication, October 22, 2016; & L5, personal communication, October 22, 2016).

Uniforms and department branded items. The brand of an organization is important for retaining employees (Cascio, 2014). The organization's name and internal stakeholders are all part of the brand (Cascio, 2014). Wearing a uniform specific to the organization is one motivating factor for employees in emergency services (Ross, Hannah, & Van Huizen, 2016). Fostering a sense of belonging and personal pride in the work place contributes to a collective pride towards the organization (Lu & Roto, 2016).

To develop a sense of pride and belonging, giving employees different types of shirts, a license plate bracket and stickers with the organization's logo is an effective strategy (L1, personal communication, October 22, 2016; L5, personal communication, October 22, 2016). L1 stated, "We want them to be proud of this company, so we give them t-shirts, and uniforms they can earn" (L1, personal communication, October 22, 2016). Providing both class A and B uniforms is an effective strategy for retention (L4, personal communication, October 22, 2016; L5, personal communication, October 22, 2016; document 1, October 22, 2016). L1 stated, "We give them a class A uniform, and it

signifies that they've worked hard to be here" (L1, personal communication, October 22, 2016). L2 indicated employees have pride in wearing the shirts with the organization logo and "it's the allure of the uniform" that retains employees (L2, personal communication, October 22, 2016). L2 stated, "They come here because they get to wear a uniform, they get to march in a parade, they get to show themselves off as a professional, you know, in uniform" (L2, personal communication, October 22, 2016).

Emergent Theme 3: Opportunities for Employee Success

The third theme to emerge was the importance of providing opportunities for employee success to allow for retention. Accommodating employee success relates to stakeholder theory. Offering opportunities for employee success in the workplace is a key retention strategy (Gialuisi & Coetzer, 2013). Communicating the expectations and opportunities to employees is also important for retention (Bryant & Allen, 2013).

All five participants mentioned the use of a credit system as an effective strategy for providing employee success (L1, personal communication, October 22, 2016; L2, personal communication, October 22, 2016; L3, personal communication, October 22, 2016; L4, personal communication, October 22, 2016; L5, personal communication, October 22, 2016; & document 1). Under a credit system, to retain status in the organization employees must meet a set number of credits each quarter (L1, personal communication, October 22, 2016; L2, personal communication, October 22, 2016; L3, personal communication, October 22, 2016; L4, personal communication, October 22, 2016; L5, personal communication, October 22, 2016; & document 1). Table 3 provides a summary of the credit system requirements (L1, personal communication, October 22,

2016; L3, personal communication, October 22, 2016; L4, personal communication, October 22, 2016; & L5, personal communication, October 22, 2016; document 1).

Table 3

Credit System & Membership Requirements at the Study Site

Requirement	Description
Credit	One credit is equivalent to one hour spent carrying out a firehouse activity
Active Member	Each member must have 35 combined fire and activity credits per quarter
Active Member Probation	Any member delinquent for 1 quarter will be put on probation for six months
Active Life Members	Any member who has served in an active capacity for a total of 10 years can apply for life member status
Excused Members	Any member excused from the 2 general meetings will be required to accrue 40 combined fire and activity credits a quarter

L3 stated,

You're required to make essentially 35 credits a quarter. It could be meetings, it could be changing a light bulb, it is one credit. Cleaning an engine is a credit.

Going to a fire is a credit. So that helps us retain volunteers in terms of our basic department requirements. (personal communication, October 22, 2016)

L4 indicated for a credit system to be an effective method for retention there is a need to accommodate schedules (L4, personal communication, October 22, 2016). L4 stated:

We saw that there was an issue where we had 10-15 of our top responders that were working night shift so they couldn't make the night calls or they couldn't

make the drills. So to try to keep them in the loop or to stop them from going to other companies or becoming delinquent in credits and getting kicked out, we started like a daytime crew. (L4, personal communication, October 22, 2016)

L1 indicated, “There are plenty of opportunities for people that have various family commitments and various job schedules to attend the fire company events and maintain their credits” (personal communication, October 22, 2016).

Emergent Theme 4: Recognition

The fourth theme that emerged was recognition and appreciation of employee efforts. One predictor of voluntary turnover is lack of recognition (Davis, 2013).

Recognition programs create value for employees and promote engagement in the company values that drove the recognition (Barcalow, 2016). Recognition relates to stakeholder theory by creating value. Stakeholder theory focuses on creating value for stakeholders in the workplace (Freeman, Harrison, Wicks, Parmar & DeColle, 2010). Recognizing and celebrating employee accomplishments and special occasions leads to a shared sense of responsibility among employees and an increase in job satisfaction (Kent, 2015).

L1, L2, L3, L4 and L5 all indicated recognition and award programs as important strategies for retention. L1 explained:

We like to recognize good things. We have an annual installation of officers dinner in January and what we do there is we recognize the top 10 responders of the company, those that come to the most fire calls for the previous year. When they go above and beyond and achieve very good things here we recognize them

at this installation dinner, whether it be the top 10 responder award, we have rookie of the year award, firefighter of the year award, fire officer of the year award, things of that nature, so that people don't go unrecognized for their good doings here at the volunteer fire department. We recognize the fire officers which have either moved up from the ranks they were already in or if they were line fire fighters through the time they've given here, showing their leadership skills, we now honor them by recognizing their movement in the fire company. (L1, personal communication, October 22, 2016)

The Length of Service Awards Program (LOSAP) was mentioned by four of the five participants as an effective retention strategy. The LOSAP provides fixed annual contributions for each employee based on the amount of active service and individual contributes to the organization (document 3, 10/24/2016). Activities counted as active service include meetings, fire calls, training, truck maintenance, cleaning, and duties related to an officer position (document 3, 10/24/2016). L3 explained:

The way it works is it's based on a credit system. So you get a credit for attempting a call, and there's a matrix that's built out. It's a point system really, I shouldn't call it a credit. So you get one point for going to a call. You get one point for being a junior officer in the department because the expectation is that you will have more responsibility. You get a couple of points more for being a mid-level officer, say a captain or a lieutenant, you get higher, chief officer ranks, you get I think 4 more points. So attending a meeting, you get a point for that. Training classes, you get another point for that. At the end of each quarter, those

points are added up, and reported to the district, which is our governing body, at the end of the year based on your points, you're given a sum of money. I think now you have, if you max out on your points it's \$1,500 a year which goes into a retirement account, so you touch that at the grand age of 60, 65, whatever the requirements are, 55. So if you think about someone coming in at 18 years old and really gives you know the way most of us have given over the years, there will be a really nice chunk of change every year getting another \$1,500. The numbers changed a little bit. It started off at \$1,500, it's probably like, \$1,605 now. (L3, personal communication, October 22, 2016).

L4 stated, "A lot of these guys want to get the LOSAP in and they want to get the credits, so it benefits everybody as a whole" (L4, personal communication, October 22, 2016). L5 claimed LOSAP also helps to retain staffing levels (L5, personal communication, October 22, 2016). L5 stated:

So you might have a guy who might have thirty to forty credits but only went to two fire calls because the time that he was here, there was only a few fire calls. But that was a few fire calls that somebody else wasn't at, so you value if that guy can be here, a couple hours a day here and there and the other people can't, well then it's a win-win because somebody's actually here. (L5, personal communication, October 22, 2016)

L1 explained, "Credits are inputted into the credit system, and we review what's considered beneficial to the fire company by you giving your time" (L1, personal communication, October 22, 2016).

Emergent Theme 5: Family Focus

The fifth theme to emerge was a focus on family. Competing demands between family and the fire service might influence a volunteer firefighter's decision to disengage (Cowlshaw, Birch, McLennan, & Hayes, 2014). All five participants mentioned having a focus on family being important for retention (L1, personal communication, October 22, 2016; L2, personal communication, October 22, 2016; L3, personal communication, October 22, 2016; L4, personal communication, October 22, 2016; & L5, personal communication, October 22, 2016). Theme 4 relates to stakeholder theory. Stakeholder theory provides an explanation for organizational success on the premise leaders base actions on the needs of stakeholders over self-serving agendas (Harrison & Wicks, 2013).

L2 indicated to overcome retention barriers related to family there was a need to evolve (L2, personal communication, October 22, 2016). L2 explained:

When I first joined, your family was nothing. It was the men and the men came down here. You never talked about your wife unless she was in the ladies auxiliary. There was, you know, the men. But nowadays we've evolved into the fact that family is a definite part of the organization. We have wives that come to big fires and help us out. But family is part of the firehouse now. We have Christmas parties for kids. We have birthday parties, kids are involved. We try to with the company picnic. It's more kid related. Bouncy houses and things like that. Juice boxes, you know, instead of just birch beer.

L3 also stated, “You try to get to know family members, accommodate family members, as much as possible” (L3, personal communication, October 22, 2016). L5 stated explained:

We’re a family-oriented fire company. So Saturday night usually the members come down with their wives and their kids. The kids are, underneath the pool table, where you see there’s a box of toys. The kids play with each other, the parents will come down here so the husband, the wife and the family is here. So it’s a place to get out of the house. It’s also a place to come down and hang out with your other friends, and the kids become friends and eventually grow up to be, you know, longtime friends. (L5, personal communication, October 22, 2016)

L4 indicated planning a lot of activities that brings everyone together in a family environment as an effective strategy for retention (L4, personal communication, October 22, 2016). L3 claimed, the secret to overcoming barriers related to family is to hook the entire family (L3, personal communication, October 22, 2016). L3 stated:

If you can hook both adults in the family, or if you can hook the kids, it’s kind of like the Disney approach. If you can hook the kids, you got two parents coming with them, so our chief is very family-focused. So we, he, his wife, will run events that are family-focused. Sometimes they’re adult-focused but they’re certainly adult-focused. So around the holidays there’s always Santa Claus here for the kids. It’s for the firefighters, their families and their kids to come, or your significant other and you know things like that. But it’s the firehouse group.

L4 mentioned encouraging employees to bring their families to hangout retains employees and introduces younger generations to the fire house (L4, personal communication, October 22, 2016).

Emergent Theme 6: Recruitment

The sixth theme to emerge was the use of recruitment methods to meet the needs of potential and existing employees. Theme 6 relates to stakeholder theory. Meeting the needs of internal stakeholders can maximize organizational performance (Baird, Geylani, & Roberts, 2012). Potential employees select organizations that can satisfy personal needs, which leads to higher levels of tenure (Rehman, 2012).

All five participants mentioned how they recruit employees as an effective method for retention (L1, personal communication, October 22, 2016; L2, personal communication, October 22, 2016; L3, personal communication, October 22, 2016; L4, personal communication, October 22, 2016; & L5, personal communication, October 22, 2016). Four participants stated that removing the residency requirement and expanding out to college students for recruitment creates higher retention rates (L1, personal communication, October 22, 2016; L2, personal communication, October 22, 2016; L4, personal communication, October 22, 2016; & L5, personal communication, October 22, 2016). L3 stated:

Before you had to be a resident of this district to join the fire company. Well we are literally a stone's throw from the next town. I knew guys that wanted to be firemen here but because they literally lived over the double yellow line, they weren't allowed to join. So we had to get through the political process of

changing those bylaws. So we got that. Now there is no residency requirement, there is a internal credit requirement. So you've adjusted the roles to allow firemen to not only enter but stay as well. So if we had guys that had given us 5, 6, 7 years, and they were moving over that double yellow line for a better school, a better job, whatever it may be, they weren't allowed to be here anymore, so they'd have to leave. So we changed that rule. (L3, personal communication, October 22, 2016)

L5 reported that "most of the members of this company live out of the district or out of town and commute back and forth to the firehouse" (L5, personal communication, October 22, 2016). L4, stated, "We try to cater to some of the younger kids to try to get them with the Wi-Fi you know and the access to a bunk room if they have to stay late, or you know to stay late because they live too far from home" (L4, personal communication, October 22, 2016). Recruiting employees that do not live in town and providing those employees with the ability to sleep at the station provides opportunities to meet employee requirements for retention (L1, personal communication, October 22, 2016).

All five participants mentioned recruiting students from a nearby university being a successful retention strategy (L1, personal communication, October 22, 2016; L2, personal communication, October 22, 2016; L4, personal communication, October 22, 2016; & L5, personal communication, October 22, 2016). L1 claimed, recruiting students and providing them a place to stay overnight is an effective strategy for retention (L1, personal communication, October 22, 2016). A study room, Wi-Fi, shower, washer and dryer were also incentives to recruit and retain college students (L5, personal

communication, October 22, 2016). L5 stated, “There’s some people that come here once a week that were students. They graduated two, three, four years ago, and they still come one night a week, do their duty crew” (L5, personal communication, October 22, 2016).

Nonwage benefits are also important in the recruitment and retention process for university students. L2 stated:

We offer, you know, meals after drills. Give a college kid a pizza, you give them a pizza, you give them a washing machine. You let them come and charge their cell phones. You give them a room to study away from you know. They can come in here any night, 24/7 to get away from it. Some it’s a place to park their car, because you can’t park at the university. (L2, personal communication, October 22, 2016)

University recruits make up 33% of the organization employees (document 2).

Table 4 provides a summary of employee demographics in relation to student status and length of service (document 2, October 22, 2016). L3 stated:

We recruit at the university. So we get more of our volunteer staff from the next town than we do from our own town. A few come in from our own district, but more from the university, so. For them it’s the opportunity to see fire. (L3, personal communication, October 22, 2016)

Table 4

Student Status of Employees at the Study Site

Type of employee	# of employees	% of employees within the organization
Non-university students	58	67%
University students	28	33%
University students with 1 or less years of service	11	13%
University students with more than 1, but less than 5 years of service	9	10%
University students with 5 or more years of service	8	9%

Applications to Professional Practice

This research may be of value in several ways to fire service leaders in volunteer fire organizations. The purpose of this study was to explore retention strategies fire service leaders have used to retain volunteer firefighters. Over 70% of U.S. fire services is volunteer (USFA, 2015c). Volunteer firefighters provide a cost savings to the economy of \$139.9 billion per year (Hall, 2014). Leaders in other industries may find the retention strategies

Based on the research question, an analysis of participant interviews and company documents, the following six themes emerged: (a) schedule accommodations, (b) nonwage benefits, (c) opportunities for employee success, (d) recognition, (e) family, and (f) recruitment. The study findings support the idea that Freeman's stakeholder theory is an important theory to consider when developing strategies to retain volunteer

firefighters. Stakeholder theory specifies organizational leaders can maximize the organization's performance by meeting the needs of those with a stake in the organization (Baird, Geylani, & Roberts, 2012).

Based on the research findings, implementing strategies that add value to the employee can lead to retention. Offering opportunities for training and professional development can lead to higher retention rates among volunteers (Cowlshaw, Birch, McLennan, & Hayes, 2014). L1 emphasized frequent training creates high moral and retention (L1, personal communication, October 22, 2016). Structuring the requirements to maintain employee status to allow for employee success can lead to retention. Providing opportunities that support employee success can increase retention (Gialuisi & Coetzer, 2013).

Ensuring employees have a proper work balance by accommodating schedules to avoid conflict with outside commitments is another important retention strategy. Younger generations value work-life balance over financial rewards (Idris, 2014), and flexible hours are also important to older generations (Kent, 2015). P3 credited the restructuring of hours employees were able to meet requirements to accommodate an employee's outside commitments as a successful strategy for retaining volunteer firefighters (L3, personal communication, October 22, 2016).

Study participants emphasized nonwage benefits as an effective retention strategy. The alignment of nonwage benefits to meet the needs of stakeholders can increase retention (Joyce & Barry, 2016). Fire service leaders can adopt some or all of the nonwage benefit strategies identified by study participants, which were: (a) uniforms and

branded items, (b) attractive working environment, (c) professional development opportunities, and (d) camaraderie activities.

Implementing ways to recognize employees was another strategy mentioned by study participants. Incorporating strategies to recognize employees creates value for employees and encourages engagement (Barcalow, 2016). Celebrating employee accomplishments and special occasions can encourage retention (Kent, 2015). All five participants gave credit to employee recognition for successful retention (L1, personal communication, October 22, 2016; L2, personal communication, October 22, 2016; L3, personal communication, October 22, 2016; L4, personal communication, October 22, 2016; L5, personal communication, October 22, 2016).

In addition, the study participants shared expanded recruitment strategies used to retain volunteer firefighters. Expanding the recruitment of volunteer firefighters beyond the local jurisdiction increased retention by meeting the needs of the employee. Satisfying the personal needs of potential employees leads to successful recruitment and increases in retention (Rehman, 2012). L5 indicated the majority of volunteer firefighters on the roster live outside of the locality (L5, personal communication, October 22, 2016). Offering out of town employees the ability to sleep at the organization reduces the distance barrier for employees recruited outside the jurisdiction (L1, personal communication, October 22, 2016).

Volunteer firefighters in the United States have declined over the past twenty years (USFA, 2015b). The strategies that emerged from participant interviews may guide fire service leaders with developing methods for retention. The study findings and

recommendations may add to the current body of knowledge in retention strategies for fire service leaders to retain volunteer firefighters.

Implications for Social Change

The results of this study may facilitate positive social change by offering organizational leadership the strategies needed to support the retention of internal stakeholders. The main purpose of the study was to explore strategies volunteer fire service leaders have used to reduce voluntary turnover. There are over one million firefighters in the United States interacting with the public (USFA, 2015c); retaining these public servants is important because it can lead to the creation of a high-quality workforce in the communities they serve (United States Office of Personnel Management, 2013). Internal stakeholders are the most valuable assets that an organization has and employee retention is beneficial for all stakeholders involved (Laddha, Singh, Gabbad, & Gidwani, 2012).

Adopting strategies to decrease volunteer firefighter turnover may also have a positive economic impact to communities protected by volunteer fire departments. The average annual cost of salary and benefits for a single paid career firefighter is \$71,500 (USFA, 2007), and volunteer firefighters in the U.S. donate approximately \$139.8 billion per year worth of time each year (Hall, 2014). The results of this study may encourage fire service leaders to adopt specific strategies to retain volunteer firefighters, which supports the United States Fire Administration's (2015b) goal to maintain a strong fire service now and in the future for supporting fire protection needs of the public.

Recommendations for Action

There are many factors that influence the retention of employees. In this study, I explored retention strategies fire service leaders can implement to retain volunteer firefighters. Implementing strategies to retain volunteer firefighters can have a positive effect on fire service organizations. Accommodating the schedules of volunteer firefighters allows for position requirements to be met and retention within the organization. Providing nonwage benefits provides something of value to employees and motivates retention. Recognizing employee accomplishments and special occasions can promote employee engagement. Creating a family friendly environment to reduce family conflict can reduce disengagement. Additionally, expanding recruitment methods can lead to a new group of employees to retain.

Fire service leaders need to pay attention to the results of this study as volunteer firefighter turnover has a direct and indirect impact to the organization. Volunteer firefighter turnover is costly and has a negative impact on employee morale. Existing fire service organizations could apply the retention strategies to reduce volunteer firefighter turnover. Prospective organizations could use the strategies to reduce organizational hardships from employee turnover.

The findings of this study can be distributed at academic and industry related conferences. I intend to share the results at seminars and conferences by developing a workshop based on the findings. Findings can also be disseminated through submissions to academic and industry related journals, and other publications.

Recommendations for Further Research

The purpose of this study was to explore strategies fire service leaders used to retain volunteer firefighters. There was limited research on the strategies fire service leaders can use to retain volunteer firefighters. Recommendations for further research include focusing research on varying types of volunteer fire departments in different geographical locations and with varying demographics. Conducting a study on a larger scale that includes volunteer fire departments from rural, urban and different social and economic backgrounds may offer specific strategies to reduce turnover to meet any unique community needs.

Another recommendation would be to conduct a study on strategies specific to the retention of female firefighters. Waters and Bortree (2012) indicated there are specific retention barriers female firefighters face, and a study specific to strategies for females may reduce turnover among females in the fire service. Implementing strategies to retain females within an organization is key for developing a strong pool of candidates for leadership positions (Johnson & Tunheim, 2016).

Reflections

As a volunteer firefighter and as a citizen in a community protected by a volunteer fire department, I had a vested interest in the retention of volunteer firefighters. Conducting a study on strategies to retain volunteer firefighters was challenging and rewarding. The interviews conducted with the five fire service leaders were exciting and informative. I anticipated difficulty gathering sufficient information with the small number of interview questions, however just the opposite occurred. During the interview

process, the participants provided lengthy responses to open-ended questions and provided a number of supporting documents. The participants had positive attitudes and shared openly.

The process of completing this study increased my level of knowledge and understanding on retention strategies. I also gained valuable skills in conducting research in general. I learned how to address any preconceived notions by following each step in the research process and being aware of any possible personal biases. The findings of this study expanded my knowledge on strategies I can use in my own fire department and as I teach at fire service conferences nationally.

Conclusion

There are over one million firefighters in the United States, with almost three-fourths being volunteers (Frattaroli et al., 2013; Haynes, & Stein, 2016). The declining trend among emergency service volunteers is a current concern for U.S. fire services (Haug & Gaskins, 2012). Employee turnover is a serious issue that can negatively impact the stability and development of an organization (Wang, Wang, Xu, & Ji, 2014). Turnover has significant direct and indirect costs to organizations (Schlechter, Syce, & Bussin, 2016). The purpose of this study was to explore strategies fire service leaders use to reduce turnover in the volunteer fire service. In this study, a qualitative methodology with a purposeful sample was used to explore the retention strategies of fire service leaders in Somerset County, New Jersey.

Six themes emerged from the research process. The findings from this study concluded accommodating the schedules of volunteers, offering nonwage benefits,

providing opportunities for employee success, employee recognition, being family friendly, and expanded recruitment methods were significant factors in employee retention. Stakeholder theory offers a possible explanation that organizational success is based upon the premise that organizational leaders base actions on the interest of stakeholders over self-serving agendas (Harrison & Wicks, 2013). Organizational leaders can use the findings to develop strategies to improve retention rates.

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Appendix A: Informed Consent

Consent Form

You are invited to take part in a research study about strategies volunteer fire service leaders use to retain volunteer firefighters. The researcher is inviting volunteer fire service officers who have increased volunteer firefighter retention to be in the study. This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Candice McDonald, who is a doctoral student at Walden University.

Criteria for Participation

Participants must be an active fire service officer in [REDACTED] New Jersey at a volunteer fire department that has successfully retained volunteer firefighters

Background Information

The purpose of this study is to explore strategies volunteer fire service officers use to retain volunteer firefighters. To participate, you must be a volunteer fire service officer that has increased volunteer firefighter retention within your fire department.

Procedures

If you agree to be in this study,

- You will be asked to participate in a face-to-face interview. The interview will include questions about strategies used at your fire department to retain volunteer firefighters. The interview will take about 30 – 45 minutes to complete.
- With your permission, the interview with you would be recorded.

- You will be asked to answer the following types of questions,
 - What strategies do you use to retain volunteer firefighters within your organization?
 - What barriers to implementing retention strategies do you face?
 - How do you address implementation barriers?
 - What strategies do you use to retain volunteer firefighters with outside family and career commitments?
 - How do you assess the effectiveness of retention?
- Following the interview, you will have the opportunity verify the interview transcription is factual. You will also have the opportunity to review the final interpretation of your experiences to ensure there are no errors.

Voluntary Nature of the Study

This study is voluntary. You are free to accept or turn down the invitation. You will not be treated differently should you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to be in the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study

Being in this type of study involves minimal risk of the minor discomforts, such as stress, that can be encountered in daily life. I do not anticipate any risks to you participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life. Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing.

There are no direct benefits to you participating in this study. The results of this study may contribute to positive social change by offering fire service leaders the

strategies needed to support the retention of volunteer firefighters. The results of this study may encourage fire service leaders to adopt specific strategies to retain volunteer firefighters.

Payment

You will earn no compensation for participating in this study.

Privacy

Reports coming out of this study will not share the identities of individual participants. Details that might identify participants, such as the location of the study, also will not be shared. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purpose outside of this research project. Data will be kept secure by keeping research records in a locked file; only the researchers will have access to the records. If the interview is recorded, I will erase the recording after it has been transcribed, which I anticipate will be within two months of its recording. Data will be kept for a period of at least five years, as required by the university.

Contacts and Questions

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via phone at 330-831-2867 or by email at Candice.McDonald@Waldenu.edu. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call the Research Participant Advocate at my university at 612-312-1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is 10-20-16-0471970 and it expires on 10/19/2017. The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

Obtaining Your Consent

If you feel you understand the study well enough to make a decision about it, please indicate your consent by signing below.

Printed Name of Participant _____

Date of Consent _____

Participant's Signature _____

Researcher's Signature _____

Appendix B: Interview Protocol and Questions

The purpose of this protocol procedure is ensure all face-to-face interviews follow the same set-up process. This document also ensures all steps for preparation of each interviews follows a set process at the start of each face-to-face meeting and continues throughout the duration of the approximately 30 minutes of recorded responses to six open-ended interview questions, follow-up, and additional prompting. All participants will have the opportunity to review interview transcriptions to confirm the accuracy of the information and to identify any errors for correction.

Protocol

- I.** Complete introduction.
- II.** Present consent form, review contents, answer any questions and/or concerns of participant(s).
- III.** Provide each participant with a copy of the consent form.
- IV.** Turn on Apple and Mac recorder devices.
- V.** Introduce the participant using a pseudonym/coded identification.
- VI.** Note the exact location, time and date.
- VII.** Begin the interview with the first question and continue through to the final question.
- VIII.** Follow-up with additional questions.
- IX.** End the interview sequence, discuss the collection of triangulation documents, and member checking procedures with the participant.
- X.** Collect copies of supporting documents.

- XI.** Thank the participant for participating in the study and exchange contact information for any follow-up questions and concerns by the participants.
- XII.** Turn off the Apple and Mac recording devices.
- XIII.** End protocol.

Interview Questions

The following interview questions address the main research topic of strategies volunteer fire service leaders use to retain volunteer firefighters. Question 1 was a probe question, Questions 2–5 are conception questions, and Question 6 is a wrap-up question.

1. What strategies do you use to retain volunteer firefighters within your organization?
2. What barriers to implementing retention strategies do you face?
3. How do you address implementation barriers?
4. What strategies do you use to retain volunteer firefighters with outside family and career commitments?
5. How do you assess the effectiveness of retention?
6. What additional information would you like to provide that I have not asked?

Appendix C: Invitation to Participants

October 22, 2016

Greetings,

You are receiving this email because you have been identified as a fire officer at the [REDACTED] Department. Your email address was obtained from the [REDACTED] Department Member Directory and I have obtained permission from Chief [REDACTED] to reach out to the officers of the [REDACTED] Department for the purposes of this study (please see attached letter).

First, let me introduce myself, my name is Candice McDonald and I am a doctoral candidate in Business Administration, Homeland Security at Walden University. My doctoral study explores leadership strategies used to retain volunteer firefighters. I am seeking participants for this study from your organization. Please accept this email as a request for your participation in this study.

What it involves: You will be asked to participate in a face-to-face interview. The interview will include questions about strategies used at your fire department to retain volunteer firefighters. The interview will take about 30 to 45 minutes to complete. With your permission, the interview with you would be recorded.

The criteria for participation: Participants must be an active fire service officer in [REDACTED], New Jersey at a volunteer fire department that has successfully retained volunteer firefighters. Attached to this email you will also find a consent form to participate in this study. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have regarding participation in this study.

If you are interested in participating or have any questions about the study, please email at Candice.McDonald@Waldenu.edu or call [REDACTED].

Sincerely,

Candice McDonald, MA