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Ethos

It appears that that the attitudes new entrants are selected for quickly change when they meet the informal culture. One reason for this may be that new entrants have little choice.

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service offered a choice and this research suggests that by concentrating on warming up one part of the cultural sea it could be possible to start a chain reaction that could transform the service.

a report by

Fitting-in^{td}

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Ethos Foreword

Three days of intensive research in Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service provided the primary data for this report. In some ways the outcome is a snapshot, in another way it enhances and builds upon the combined output of a lifetime spent studying fire service culture. As with any project, the scope to undertake further research may always add to the findings. However, there is no reason to doubt the fundamental finding “*that it is possible to maintain the values that firefighters have when they join the service.*” Equally we are clear that we have gone a long way to answering a question on the lips of many leaders in the fire service. “*Why is it that the values and attitudes held by new firefighters are almost predisposed to change from the day that they commence training?*”

In summary, this research focuses on a cohort of firefighters whose decision over industrial action (during initial training) divided them into two groups. The outcome for one group was very similar to the majority of firefighters who have gone before them. They accepted elements of informal culture in training (Baigent with Rolph 2002; Baigent et al 2003), chose to strike and then fitted-in when they joined the watch (Baigent 2001b). The second group had a very different experience; they avoided the informal culture and chose not to strike. As a result, they were uniquely introduced to their operational service by riding pumps with principal and senior officers in an intensive 26 days of continuous duty. Following this experience, this group were all posted to the same station where they work with other firefighters who were already challenging some elements of the informal culture.

Perhaps as an unintended consequence the move to this station put this second group into a location that was first suggested by Baigent with Rolph (2002: 32). An argument that was reinforced in the Sunrise Report (Baigent et al 2003): a place where senior managers were ‘micro-managing.’ This approach is something that I have continually theorised about and advocated as a way of maintaining “*the original reasons why the trainee was employed*” (Baigent with Rolph 2002: 31).

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Outcomes for press/briefing

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service is an “*Excellent Fire Authority*” (Audit Commission 2005) with Beacon status.

Ethos research was based around a cohort of 16 firefighters who joined the Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service during 2006 and sought to answer a question on the lips of leaders in the fire and rescue service – “*Why is it that the values and attitudes held by new firefighters almost seem predisposed to change from the day that they commence training?*”

At some point during their training, these firefighters had to make a choice about taking part in industrial action. For some of these firefighters it appears that having to choose was difficult. However, their choice may have been influenced by the probability that out of the 16 trainees at least two people spoke out – one for the industrial action and one against. If this ‘Spartacus moment’ occurred (as we believe it did) then the choice it provided reduced the possibility of ‘group think’ pushing everyone in the same direction (see Janis 1972).

For many of the new trainees, having to make a decision about industrial action involved the type of dilemma that is capable of disrupting the attitudes people have about their work (Mayo 1949). The strike was not about money – so decisions were not made on the basis of financial gain. More likely their choice was on the basis of the route that they thought would best fulfil (or frustrate) their belonging and esteem needs (see Maslow 1987).

If pushed to make a decision it is our view that as the cohort had similar needs when they joined the fire and rescue service, the selection process had already worked well. From then onwards it was more a case of people making decisions on the basis of where they thought they would best fulfil their sense of belonging and self-esteem. Here it is impossible to avoid history. Away from the fire and rescue service, Merseyside has a considerable tradition of workers’ unity (Pilger 1996; Yolles 2002). This history is likely to have been influential in the choice that individuals made about supporting the FBU or their employers.

However tragic it is that this cohort of firefighters split in the way they did, the choice not to take part in industrial action was taken by four firefighters. As a result, their initial socialisation into the operational side of the service followed a non-traditional route. These firefighters spent an intensive 26 days of operational experience working alongside senior/principal managers. Following the industrial action this group was micro-managed at a chosen station where they were able to avoid fitting-in with the informal culture (see Baigent 2001b). Consequently these firefighters hardly had their attitudes challenged by any informal pressures and they remain fully signed up to the formal culture and their Chief Fire Officer.

Analysis of this example suggests it may be possible to avoid the ‘*predisposition to change*’ mentioned earlier. In particular, the *Ethos* research offers the possibility that a transparent formal micro-management of individual’s entry into the fire and rescue service may overcome many of the cultural problems that occur in the fire and rescue service; including the considerable difficulties with equality/diversity.

The suggestion that managers need to be accountable in this way would be expected in outside industry. But in the fire and rescue service, despite one in four staff being managers, there is a history of resistance at all levels, because managers have developed their attitudes under the influence of the informal culture (Baigent 2001b; a).

Innocently the research has revealed an actual example of a theory that has been argued by fitting-in for some time (Baigent 2002) and again in the Sunrise Report (Baigent et al 2003). This argument is best summarised now as:

Spreading resources over the whole fire and rescue service has not resulted in cultural change. Research suggests that it may be better to concentrate efforts on 'training stations' where micro-management can ensure that the attitudes new entrants have about the fire and rescue service when they join are realised through their service's accepted core values.

Simply put this suggests that rather than trying to change a whole fire and rescue service – efforts should concentrate on *warming up part of the cultural sea*. This would see all new entrants serving at stations where they receive the similar attention to the second cohort of trainees. These stations should also provide a springboard for selecting all future promotions and in this way a new warm cultural sea could gradually extend to other stations, and the professionalism and diversity of the service improved and evidenced.

Care must be taken to avoid these stations being seen as elite. Were elite status to be claimed (even informally) then the possibility could be that this station would, develop to claim they know best how to run the fire and rescue service (as opposed to their Chief Fire Officer). To avoid this outcome, micro-management should closely follow Adair's (1993) Action Centred Leadership; concentrating on task, group and the individual. And because the fire and rescue service involves a workforce steeped in tradition, it may be better to look at some older and more established theoreticians to help with this management. Theorists such as Mayo (Mayo 1949; Baigent 2007a) and Maslow (Maslow 1987; Baigent 2007b), who were more widely read when the industrial scene involved a similar 'cultural lock-in' (Burke 2002) to that currently experienced throughout the fire and rescue service.

These findings may have particular relevance for overcoming resistance to change and in particular something close to our hearts, reducing the harassment of those who challenge the image of the white male heterosexual firefighter.

As a consequence of this research, Fitting-in has developed a package (including research and development workshops) to support their arguments within this report (Fitting-in 2007).

'The five M's'

1. Market - identify what is needed and set out to achieve it
2. Manage – actually manage the watch according to formal core values and train all those involved (Ensure this process is transparent and accountable following an Action Centred Leadership model (Adair 1993) and paying due regard to Mayo (1949) and Maslow (1987))
3. Multiply – gradually extend the process to other stations/watches
4. Mediate – involve the FBU - promote rights and responsibilities
5. Monitor – set up a small group under the Chief Fire Officer to monitor progress – fitting-in would be willing to serve on this group.

Firefighters can choose to follow cultural values or not, it is up to them. However, the conditions under which firefighters make those choices can appear restrictive. Choice for individual firefighters can be limited by the formal and informal structures around them
(Baigent with Rolph 2002)

1. Introduction

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service (MFRS) commissioned this research as an initial academic study of the attitudes/values of a cohort of operational firefighters recruited in 2006. This research fits with MFRS IRMP (MFRS 2007) and will hopefully help in the decision making process to determine an appropriate attraction, development and retention strategy for forthcoming recruitment.

From the start, it is recognised that firefighters (just like other new employees) are prepared to compromise some of their personal attitudes/values when they join the fire and rescue service. There is nothing new in this suggestion (Goffman 1959; 1969; Lemert 1997). However, the extent that new firefighters have to adjust their behaviour to fit-in with a number of competing agendas within the fire and rescue service is difficult for the outsider to understand. Fitting-in is not compulsory, but almost a prerequisite to learning your job as a firefighter – not to do so can involve a considerable sanction for firefighters (Baigent 2001b).

Extensive debate around how the phenomenon of fitting-in works can be found elsewhere, but it may be useful to provide some brief details. Initial training teaches firefighters their basic skills and introduces them to the formal values of the fire and rescue service; it can also prime trainees awareness of an informal culture (Baigent and Rolph 2002; Baigent 2003). Initial training complete, new firefighters then join an established team. Local managers and experienced firefighters then fit new firefighters in with watch norms and values. Depending on the predominant personalities on the watch, this introduction can to a varying degree encourage the acceptance of some informal values that operate in resistance to formal ones (Darlington 1998 provides a record of this happening in MFRS).

There has often been surprise shown as to how new firefighters join the fire and rescue service with one set of values and then quickly change them, but there has been little evidence of how this can be avoided. That is until *Ethos*. What *Ethos* provides is data that suggests how one group of new firefighters may be avoiding the difficult outcomes of fitting-in with informal culture. These findings may have particular relevance for overcoming resistance to change and in particular something close to our hearts, reducing the harassment of those who challenge the image of the white male heterosexual firefighter.

2. Methodology

The methodology has been both qualitative and quantitative. Primary data was collected from principal, senior and watch managers, firefighters and FBU representatives using interview, focus groups, questionnaires, an elite briefing workshop on equality and background information from other research.

Collation of this data took place using NVivo and SPSS. Grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967) provides the tool for analysis because it provides the flexibility to respond to any leads and aims to provide a report firefighters could understand and which makes recommendations for positive action.

3. The focus groups

Introduction

At the start of each focus group participants were provided with an explanation of the purpose of the research, who the report was for, and who was paying for it. This included discussion about the independence and integrity of academic research, the protection of data (including the recordings that were made) and the anonymity of participants.

Each person was given the researchers' email addresses and telephone numbers in case they wanted to provide further evidence or had any later concerns. One person used this support.

Group-one

From the beginning of the interview this group were relaxed about their role in the research. They were interactive, comfortable, confident and were unconcerned about articulating their ambition and 'prospects.' They trusted us and MFRS managers.

Group-two

It needs to be recognised that these firefighters had considerable concerns about our purpose. They were wary in contrast to group-one, they may have a 'fear' (unspecified) of something or some people.

Analysis

Each group's reaction suggests how they perceive their relationship with MFRS. Group-one were comfortable about their place in the organisation and were unafraid to speak out about their views and how their attitudes had been realised. Group-two were not acting in circumstances that they saw as being in their control; their responses were unlikely to be a complete reflection of their thoughts. As a result their evidence was limited but we are confident about what we write and the analysis of their contribution.

4. Joining: attitudes/values

Both groups began their careers with a collective understanding that in joining the fire and rescue service they were joining an elite group. They were the 'chosen' 16 from over 6,000 applicants. It was clearly no understatement when one firefighter said that the fire and rescue service "*was not easy to get into.*"

Image of the Fire Service

In order to identify their attitudes and values, the two groups were asked to reflect back to before they joined and discuss their image of the fire and rescue service and their perceived role in the organisation.

The list of attitudes was put onto the white board for discussion.

Merseyside 1	Merseyside 2
About the job Great job Career prospects Good wages Pension	About the job Jobs satisfaction Rescues Emergency services
Personal Needs / Dividends Respected Job satisfaction – pride in yourself Pushing your own personal boundaries Role model Contributing to and helping the community Saving lives Public perception positive as opposed to police	Personal Needs / Dividends To be looked up to by community Team work Responsibility Sense of achievement Role model Being part of the community Excitement
Work Practical Different everyday	Work Putting out fires Active job Hands on

Each group were then asked to identify their potential concerns and these too were put on the white board.

Potential problems Politics Settling-in / Fitting-in Overcoming your fears Could I do it Getting respect Trying to control yourself	Potential problems Fitting-in all the time Emotional/Traumas Considered dangerous / Risk to self Meeting new people Wide spectrum of people Getting used to shift-work and anti social hours
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This list is further supported by data gathered from a questionnaire completed before the start of each focus group.

Once the list was developed, each group took part in a discussion to evaluate the extent to which the image of their roles had been realised and the relevance of their potential concerns.

Analysis

Initial analysis of the data so far (particularly when the answers from the questionnaire are included) suggests that both groups had very similar aspirations of the fire and rescue service.

The focus group discussions suggest that these two groups were managing to fulfil the attitudes and values that they expected to achieve in the fire and rescue service.

Significantly, the analysis of the discussion suggests that each group are fulfilling their attitudes and values differently. One is developing them (solely) through the formal culture and the other (partially at least) through the informal culture.

5. Industrial Action

None of those who took part in the focus groups expected (or wanted) to be put into a position where they had to make a decision about industrial action. The data suggests that both groups recognise their decision on industrial action will ‘determine’ their future in the fire and rescue service for the next thirty years. The following provides a collective view:

It is quite disturbing that we did the training together then make one choice and how that affected the whole group, that one decision

Group-one

As has been suggested earlier, group-one were prepared to speak freely. Their data suggests that they were previously unaware of the extent that politics are influential in the fire and rescue service:

I knew like any job there was politics in it but I didn't know specifically about in the fire brigade

We joined and then it all came in ... I didn't know about the [internal] political side

Didn't know about internal politics

Apart from being surprised about the internal politics, group-one (and two) were concerned that whilst tradition suggested they would not be involved in the strike, the reality on this occasion was that they were. They had to make a decision about striking without really understanding what was happening:

We all had a choice, there's the pressure of the job and the pressure of the union

Not our fight to fight

They did it to fit in ... I respect their choice

I was totally on my own there and I had to look at the pro's and con's of my decision and what I would be happy with

Group-one' decision about striking was unequivocal:

You shouldn't strike as an emergency service

Group-two

The group-two dynamic was in stark contrast to group-one. They were hesitant, uncomfortable, and concerned about articulating their views; they were unsure if this research would be used to harm them. Despite their reluctance, it was clear that they too were confused about the politics

In the past training courses have been exempted from strikes but for some reason we were dragged into it

*It was very political, it was very political at the time and it is very political now
[our emphasis]*

Both the FBU and managers gave advice:

'We had 11 visits [from senior and principal managers]

They [FBU] eventually did see us in our own time

Unable to avoid what appears to have been a very traumatic situation for each of them, they consider that they made their *own* decision about the strike:

'There wasn't any .. no there wasn't any .. it wasn't a case of if you go on strike this will happen to you it was nothing like that .. it was our decision .. we had to make our own decision'

But in a way that is what we were asked to do.. we were made to make a decision as to whether we would work or not before we'd left this safety zone of the training school .. and we were made to make an opinion without knowing enough information to base that opinion upon

You know we did not know what the situation was on the station or anything like that .. if we weren't a part of the ballot then I didn't think we would be anything to do with the strike

Group-two firefighters consider that they were prematurely and unfairly forced to make a decision about whether to strike. It would probably be realistic to suggest that these firefighters were close to a state of purgatory. They recognised that they were damned whichever way they turned. In seeking a sense of belonging, they may have consequently been *pulled towards* the informal culture rather than driven away from the formal:

*The right thing to do .. the other option was to .. I would rather be part of the bigger group
[our emphasis]*

Conclusion

For some it may be surprising that all the trainees did not vote the same way. Group think is powerful in the fire and rescue service. The fact that they had a choice probably came about because at least two people spoke out – one for the industrial action and one against. If this ‘Spartacus moment’ occurred (as we believe it did) then it provided this unexpected opportunity for choice (see Janis 1972).

As a consequence of this choice, what had been previously been a parallel experience ended. In particular, the way that each person hoped to realise their ambitions in the fire and rescue started to divide.

6. How will group-one develop their attitudes/values?

As the strike started group-one firefighters reported for duty:

We were deemed competent but we hadn't passed out we only had a couple of days left .. we were deemed competent

We worked .. although it was quite a negative way we got into active duty before the majority of the other trainees .. it was actually really positive for us because we gained work experience

A unique experience: 26 days continuous duty.

Asking these new firefighters to work continuously for 24 hours a day for 26 consecutive days could be seen as exploitation. But, this group of ‘new’ firefighters would argue against such thoughts. To them this prospect appeared as a gift: a unique opportunity to experience the work that they joined to do:

‘The atmosphere was brilliant, that was what we expected the job to be, everyone coming to work and enjoying it and the team spirit’.

In Maslow's (1987) terms, these particular firefighters were ticking a lot of the higher level boxes – it may not be a too liberal interpretation to suggest that in their own minds they were ‘self actualising’.

Working with managers

There was an unforeseen consequence of group-one’s decision to avoid industrial action. They were not only riding continuously as part of a first line crew on an appliance, they were doing so alongside senior and principal managers. Exposure to this type of experience (and the effects of this association on their socialisation into the fire and rescue service) makes these new firefighters almost unique.

Managers accept that following the completion of their training there has been an element of “*looking after them.*” This (closer) support involved putting all of the group-one firefighters together at a station that was already challenging the FBU on first responder attendance (Shotton 2007); group-one firefighters also received search and rescue training (SRT) much earlier than would have normally been expected.

Increased attention

The data also suggests that group-one firefighters consider that they are now under additional pressure due to increased monitoring of their performance:

Other people just did the firefighting but we got the extra courses

I think there is extra pressure there as well because .. as well .. as being at the station .. as well, there was more visits [by senior managers] as well as more spotlight to get things right and do it well'
[our emphasis]

After the dispute we gained so much .. however now the bar has been moved up .. there's a new set of challenges'

... they [senior managers] want us high performing they want us to out perform everyone else

Posting group-one firefighters to this station also provides them with an opportunity to continue their earlier accelerated entry to the fire and rescue service - they recognise this and have again responded to this attention.

Labelled

However, these firefighters still have to mix with firefighters who took part in the industrial action.

'When I have gone to other stations the way I have been treated has infuriated me and I have had to use self-control'

'You get detached duties in who come in and try to fill places and things like that but they don't speak to us at all'

I've had people sit there asleep not say a word .. I've always said hello to whoever has been detached

Not all their experiences were negative. Some firefighters were prepared to speak to them. Nonetheless, measures taken to 'protect them' have added to the already complex relations with those firefighters who did strike.

Analysis of outcomes for group-one

Moving seamlessly from the training environment to ride alongside senior officers continuously during the strike, and then given a *very early* opportunity to work as part of the SRT has provided this group with a largely unbroken exposure to the formal culture of the fire and rescue service.

The extra attention placed on group-one firefighters pushes them towards promotion and as a result will pull them further towards manager's formal culture (discussed later).

To a large extent, both managers and the informal culture have *labelled* group-one; they have been given a *master status* (Becker 1996) because of the choice they made.

Conclusion

Because they know they are being watched (by both the managers and FBU members) it is hardly a surprise if these firefighters self-regulate to fit with the expectations of those around them. This gaze results in them being both pulled and pushed towards their Chief Officer. (Foucault 1977).

In summary:

This unique experience for group-one firefighters provides potential unintended consequences:

1. Under normal circumstances, firefighters would hardly have met a senior manager at this stage in their career, let alone spent real quality time with them.
2. As a consequence, group-one's interaction with managers provides the means for them to (innocently) bypass the process of fitting-in with the informal culture at a crucial stage in their career
3. As a first responder station (and SRT) this station exists in an environment where the FBU hold little sway
4. As they have all been posted to the same station this new cohort can continue to support each other in a micro-environment
5. Without having been shown any alternative view, this group has been able to maintain the attitudes (dreams) that they joined with
6. Encouraged/pulled by managers (and pushed away by the FBU) their values and attitudes have developed alongside the core values of MFRS

Analysis of outcomes for group one

Avoiding the traditional exposure to the informal culture has had a pronounced effect on group-one firefighters. Their treatment since the strike has meant that rather than being persuaded to join in with informal values (Baigent 2001b) they realise the fulfilment of their ambitions exist with their Chief Officer.

7. How will group-two develop their attitudes/values?

Group-two firefighters joined the picket lines at stations.

Although data was limited from group-two firefighters, it is not difficult to recognise that their experience has been very different – they were pulled towards the informal culture and pushed away from managers – they will be fulfilling their attitudes/values within this environment.

Dividends Group Two

There were considerable dividends for group-two firefighters when they joined their watch on the picket lines.

We were welcomed with open arms

Everyone willing to help you and show you what you are not sure of

There were people who worked and people didn't work and that it's the topic of conversation as well we had something to talk about

Instantly get thousands of mates getting a sense of belonging

No problem fitting-in, the strike bonded people together .. before we finished our training course last year we were split into a strike that bonded people together

You do not have to be in Merseyside for long to recognise that a foremost topic of conversation is the struggle between managers and the FBU. Group-two firefighters were well versed in these conversations and because of their action in support of the strike they were given considerable status by the 'older' firefighters.

By choosing to take industrial action, group-two firefighters may have been fast-tracked into the informal culture. They avoided the traditional need to prove themselves to the informal hierarchy. They were accepted at the cutting edge of the informal culture during the industrial action. In many ways this goes against the flow of data from previous research that suggests new firefighters have to first earn their place through 'time served' before the informal culture will accept them (Baigent 2001b).

This challenge to earlier findings can be accommodated within the overall premise of fitting-in. Traditionally new firefighters have to prove themselves and earn their right to be heard in the informal hierarchy. They do this by showing they have adopted watch norms and values (Baigent 2001). Notwithstanding this view, it is easy to see how the industrial action integrated (and elevated) group-two firefighters prematurely into the informal culture. Not the least because the main talking point at the time was (and still is) the industrial action; these new entrants were given a heroic status because of the decision that they made to join their 'comrades.'

Research data also suggests that these new firefighters were included to such an extent that they were also involved in watch social life out of hours. This acceptance would further accelerate their fast-tracking and integration into the informal culture. This may have provided some compensation for the unforeseen ramifications of the strike and magnified the existence of the 'them' and 'us' culture for group-two. Perhaps this 'insight' sums up the extent of their socialisation

'There are changes being made at the moment that aren't making it better'

This firefighter has clearly heard the views of the FBU.

Analysis of outcomes for group two

Despite having been through a very different experience from their very close association with the informal culture, group-two still retain the attitudes/values that they had in common with group-one when they joined.

What is different for this group is that they are more likely to realise their attitudes/values within the informal culture.

The consequences of the strike bonded these new firefighters into the informal culture. As much as managers reward group-one firefighters, this group are recognised by the informal culture for the decisions that they made.

The anticipated consequence spoken of earlier, of joining the fire service with one set of values and then being pre-disposed to change them to fit-in with the informal culture, would be seen by many as being achieved.

8. Promotion

The attitudes of both groups of firefighters on promotion are interesting. Currently the second group appear to be self-selecting to avoid promotion. This attitude significantly contrasts to the values and attitudes of group-one. This data adds to an argument made in earlier research (Baigent 2001b). In summary this suggested:

1. Some firefighters are intent on seeking promotion and these firefighters do self-select to stand apart from the watch. The subsequent marginalisation they experience reinforces their earlier view that they did not want to remain a firefighter and further drives them towards management as a career move
2. Some firefighters who seek promotion may retain much of their earlier socialisation towards the attitudes/norms/values of the informal culture but have to (at least) accommodate formal norms and values to make themselves attractive to management
3. Those firefighters who in contrast to those individuals who seek promotion can marginalise managers' core values; they do not see any advantage in following the rules of the formal culture or in pleasing managers (except for local gain)

It is in every manager's interest to have sufficient candidates for promotion. Currently MFRS indicate that this pool of candidates has fallen. Given that people who want promotion are also easier to manage, this means that the resources MFRS needs to manage are being reduced on two fronts.

9. Theory – acting the part

In order to adapt to new environments and new organisational cultures people can act a part to give the impression that they belong (Goffman 1997). To be accepted they mirror the actions of the group they want to join. This is called *surface acting* (see Hochschild 1983). Gradually, as these individuals 'prove' their membership socialisation increasingly pulls them in. Surface acting then becomes the natural (to them) way of acting and this is termed as *deep acting* (see Hochschild 1983). All the firefighters who took part in this research provide a practical example of this theoretical position. Despite a very rocky introduction to the fire and rescue service, they have made decisions on the best way to achieve their needs

and surface acting has turned to deep acting as they fit-in. One group with managers, the other group with the informal culture.

The equality agenda provides an example

Traditionally firefighters fit-in through an acceptance of both formal and informal norms and values. In some areas this can lead to considerable difficulties. Nowhere is this more evident than the ongoing problems the fire and rescue service has with equality. Managers and the FBU at a formal level are signed up to providing a diverse and fair fire and rescue service (FBU 1999; McGuirk 2002). Notwithstanding this, there remains a considerable informal pressure to resist the employment of people who do not fit with the traditional views of the overwhelmingly white male workforce. Despite the joint view of Chief Officers and the FBU, the fact that one in three/four people in the fire and rescue service are managers, and all the resources the fire and rescue service has at its disposal (including considerable support from the Fire Minister), something is uniting firefighters (and many of their managers) to frustrate the equality agenda. There would be many that would identify this unity as occurring around masculinity (Baigent 1999; Baigent and Rolph 2002; Baigent 2003) but this is another debate.

Until the *Ethos* research took place, it was possible for fitting-in to theorise how the difficulties with equality might be managed. The theory was relatively simple and was based on earlier research. Our argument was and still is that from induction to the point at which firefighters were able to *deep act*, they should be kept away from the difficult aspects of informal culture. This would be done by posting all new entrants to training watches where they would *actually be* performance managed according to agreed norms and values (these watches would be managed by promotion candidates who should equally be managed to ensure they follow the formal culture). The *Ethos* research has unintentionally provided the data to show how this theory could work in practise.

Why do we argue this?

Group-one, provides some early evidence of what might happen if everyone in the fire service was actual performance managed according to visible and accepted core values. Although circumstances rather than planning have provided for this situation, group-one have effectively had no opportunity to join the informal culture. More than that, group-one have actually been pushed away from it.

The evidence clearly suggests that because of their unique working relations with senior officers during their continuous spell of duty, group-one firefighters were seamlessly socialised into the formal culture. Moreover, their experience after training has been one in which they have largely mixed with groups of firefighters who are resisting the informal culture (ODPM 2006; Prichard 2006). These new firefighters are undoubtedly very happy with the opportunities that they have been offered. Almost unaware of the informal culture, the evidence so far suggests that group-one firefighters are forming up according to formal core values (Audit Commission 2005).

10. Final thoughts.

I regard these five days of research as having been one of the most difficult times in my life. I have experienced a situation where the formal and informal cultures are locked into the embrace of a continual round of storming, forming and reforming in opposition to each other (Tuckman 1965).

Notwithstanding this area of turbulence, the job is still getting done. Service delivery is positive; fires and emergencies are attended by a professional and skilled workforce that wants to serve. Community Fire Safety has provided over 300,000 smoke detectors as well as fire safety advice aimed at reducing fires. The Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service is a Beacon Authority that has received the highest level of praise from the Audit Commission who have labelled the authority as “Excellent” (Audit Commission 2005: 4).

The Authority has risen to the challenge of modernisation and made great strides in reshaping its organisational culture and its service delivery towards better protection of its most vulnerable communities. Members and staff are delivering improved services that balance reliable emergency response based on challenging local standards with good protection measures and effective prevention strategies. Good intelligence systems and reliable data sources enable it to plan well and target efforts and resources to achieve maximum benefit in high risk areas. A robust IRMP integrates with corporate strategies and drives clear operational plans that are well managed to achieve the targeted outcomes
(HMCIFS 2001)

Notwithstanding the corporate success of the fire and rescue service in Merseyside, these two groups of firefighters are clearly on different routes in providing *their service* to the public. Group-one have been very free in providing their view. They joined to be part of the core values of the fire and rescue service and everything that has happened encourages them to stay on this path. The second group also had similar views, but their socialisation has involved them in realising *their service* to the public (at least in part) through the informal culture. The views of the informal culture are well known.

The gap between managers and the workforce (on a national scale) is recognised (ODPM 2006; Prichard 2006) and new core values have been formally adopted with the intention of uniting the two groups and their cultures. Nonetheless, we live in a real world and the difficulties between the FBU and managers may act as a glue to bind group-one firefighters into the management culture and group-two into the informal culture.

So it remains for all firefighters – that is until *Ethos*. The way that group-one firefighters’ unique experience has led to them *deep acting* the formal culture is an interesting discovery. Therefore the concept of training stations/watches as a way of developing formal core values in individuals is worthy of considerable further thought. Avoiding firefighters so called *pre-disposition to change* is a reward well worth spending time on. Equally it may be argued that for those firefighters already in service, training stations to enhance their professional status may also offer them an opportunity (and safe haven) to re-live their earlier enthusiasm for their job.

Further Research

There is also another interesting possibility and there is much more work to do on this. As with these firefighters (and other firefighters we have studied), they all joined with very similar attitudes associated with service to the public. After or during their training firefighters attitudes are seen as moving away from the formal culture towards the informal. It may be that it is not the attitudes that changes. It may be that individuals look for who they believe can best serve their expectations. We have seen from this research that group-one believe the formal culture would best serve their needs; group two chose the informal culture.

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