A New Front Line? Workforce development issues from an evolving fire service

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Abstract

Purpose - Over the past twenty years, the Fire and Rescue Services (FRS) workforce in England has experienced significant developments as part of New Labour's modernisation agenda with the *Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004* and the increasing focus on prevention and community safety. Subsequent organisational changes and the introduction of new community safety services dynamically altered the role of Fire Fighters and introduced new roles into these organisations. The purpose of this paper is to explore the issues relating to an evolving fire service workforce and the tensions present in the development of new professional roles.

Design/methodology/approach – An exploratory qualitative critical realist case study approach was undertaken, employing semi-structured interviews and focus groups of employees across one Fire and Rescue Service in England.

Findings – The findings of the present study identify several emerging issues from a changing fire service. In particular the frictions between different aspects of the organisation, and the tensions in the development of career 'ladders' for non-operational roles.

Originality/value – To the author's knowledge, this is the first paper that examines the issues surrounding the development and evolution of professional roles in community safety aspects within the Fire and Rescue Service in England.

Keywords: Fire Service, Workforce Development, Organisational Change, Community Safety, Prevention Agenda,

Paper type: Research paper

Introduction

Since the *Fire Services Act 1947* there had been little change in terms of responsibilities for the Fire and Rescue Services (FRS) in England and had predominantly managed to avoid the modernisation agenda for the UK public sector with the rise of neo-liberalism and New Public Management (NPM) during the 1980s and early 1990s (Ferlie *et al.*, 1996; Fitzgerald and Stirling, 1999; Harlow, 2003; Grant, 2005). With the election of the New Labour government in 1997, there was a swift change in the political agenda for the FRS. The Bain Review in 2002 identified that the FRS were 'out of date' and called for reform including to be significantly involved in prevention and community safety work (Bain, Lyons and Young, 2002). The Fire Brigades Union were negotiating for an improved compensation and benefits package for firefighters at the time which culminated in the first national strike of the FRS leading to the deployment of the army to respond to emergencies (Andrews, 2010).

The Bain review and the strikes provided the political impetus for a modernisation agenda of the FRS (Fitzgerald, 2005). Following a Government White Paper in 2003 which took on board the recommendations for change from the Bain Review (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2003; Bain et al., 2002), the Government passed the *Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004*. This act introduced significant changes for the FRS, including the introduction of Integrated Risk Management Plans (IRMPs) for FRS to tailor their services to local needs, and expanded the statutory duty for prevention and community safety activities. This expansion of the statutory duty introduced new ways of working for the FRS, with many looking to evolve the Home Safety Assessments (HSAs). These HSAs initially involved providing fire safety advice and the fitting of two free smoke alarms, over-time FRS evolved these services including the introduction of new roles in community safety departments, working in partnership with stakeholders (such as the NHS) to target services, and becoming involved in broader public health and social care issues such as domestic abuse, health, and ageing safely.

The development and management of the community safety and prevention work with the FRS workforce in England has received little focus. Research into the FRS has predominately focussed on operational firefighters in terms of training and development or the effects of/and responding to emergencies (for example Brunsden, Hill and Maguire, 2014) or broader public service accountability, assurance and organisational performance management (for example Spencer *et al.*, 2019; Murphy and Ferry, 2018; Murphy and Greenhalgh, 2013). The creation of new roles and functions within the FRS and the work these personnel are undertaking are vital to reducing the number of Accidental Dwelling Fires (ADFs) and injuries (Arch and Thurston, 2013; Andrews, 2010), therefore, it is important to understand the experiences of this element of the FRS workforce. The purpose of this paper is therefore to explore the issues relating to an evolving fire service workforce and the tensions present in the development of new professional roles in order to address the gap in the literature and support FRS in the management of these new functions.

Approach

The study utilised a qualitative exploratory case study design to develop new theoretical knowledge pertinent to the research aims and questions, which is valuable in developing an understanding of why and how a particular phenomenon is occurring in a particular context (Pettigrew, Woodman and Cameron, 2001; Yin, 2017). The use of a qualitative approach enabled a rich and detailed understanding of the FRS employees experiences (Bradley, Curry and Devers, 2007). This study aimed to examine the subjective experiences of employees as well as the casual factors influencing events in one particular fire service, identifying the need for a broad theoretical paradigm, thus, the study is underpinned by a Critical Realist framework. It is important to note in this paper we do not provide an in-depth account of Critical Realism, nor the strengths or weaknesses of this framework, please see Fletcher (2017) or Oliver (2012) for more detailed accounts. Critical Realism is an alternative methodological framework to positivism and relativism, building upon aspects of both (Easton, 2010). This approach identifies that there is a reality that "exists independently of our knowledge" (Sayer, 1992, p. 5) but our knowledge of this reality is socially constructed (Oliver, 2012), where this reality is "theory-laden" (Fletcher, 2017, p. 182) and these theories enable us to develop knowledge of the social world. However, not all theories are equally true, some can be truer or less true accounts of reality (Oliver, 2012), and that there are multiple causal mechanisms that can affect the social world and our knowledge of the social world must be seen as fallible (Easton, 2010). This approach is particularly suited to developing an understanding of why events occur in a particular circumstance and how agency and structures operate within an organisation (Fairclough, 2005; Easton, 2010).

Semi-structured interviews and focus groups with 26 employees (including middle and senior management, operational firefighters and community safety employees) of one fire service in the Northwest of England were used to collect data in 2014. Fifteen interviews were conducted, with three focus groups involving 11 participants. The participants were sampled through liaising with the organisation, through contacts developed through the fieldwork preparation and a snowball approach through asking participants to pass round information sheets to colleagues. All interview transcripts were transcribed and analysed using an inductive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Terry *et al.*, 2017; Archer *et al.*, 2013), with an iterative analysis of the transcripts as new codes and themes were generated. An inductive coding approach was employed, identifying codes from interesting or relevant data. These codes were then reviewed to identify themes, which were then subsequently reviewed through an iterative analytical process to examine for consistency and duplication and through this process developed higher-order themes to generate deeper causal mechanisms and to move beyond 'rich description' (Oliver, 2012). This approach gave useful insights into the mechanisms involved in the organisational changes in this organisation and the experiences of employees relating to these mechanisms. It is important to note that the findings are "a product of data plus what the researcher brings to the analysis" (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p. 33) and with critical realism that the findings are fallible and situated in a particular time and context (Maxwell, 2012), it is possible that the understanding of these by the reader, who could have different experiences, could have slightly different interpretations.

Findings

The analysis identified five themes of issues related the development and evolution of the FRS in regard to the expanding community safety work in this particular case study organisation. The next section of this paper now discusses these five themes.

Difference in Home Safety Assessment (HSA) delivery

An ambivalence in how some groups within the case study organisation were engaging with how the fire service has adapted was identified predominantly through the *difference in HSA delivery*. Participants expressed that some firefighters, while they delivered the HSAs, did this as a tick-box exercise and explained that this was influenced by performance targets set as identified in the quote below.

> *"They go in, they've got targets to meet, they want to get back because lunch gets cooked at 1pm, and they go. Do you do this? Yes. Do you have a smoke alarm? Yeah. That's fine, shut your door, etc." [136]*

While a few participants discussed that it was not all firefighters who were 'just focussing on the numbers', some did describe that firefighters would deliver HSAs in ways just to meet their targets. In some circumstance, participants highlighted this meant the quality of the HSAs was diminished. Some of the examples of this provided by participants included carrying out repeat visits in a short amount of time or saying no-one was home just to be able to tick off that they had visited.

> *"I witnessed some behaviour that I did not think was in the spirit of delivering home safety assessments ... there was some people who it was more of a tick box exercise, they have got their target, they've got their sheet of paper, they just want to tick people off, so they quite often go on repeat visits in a short amount of time ... and not really caring that they've been there before, they just want to get through the door again and say we've done another HSA." [154]*

Some participants expressed that this ambivalence to the changes was accentuated by firefighters who had been with the organisation since before the changes. Participants explained that longer tenure firefighters value the exciting 'old ways' of sitting on the fire engine and having meals with their watch. Some participants discussed this as encouraging newer employees to embrace old practices.

> *"They employ modern-day firefighters with the understanding that it is more than putting out fires and cutting people out of cars, and people can come in with that attitude and they're selected through the process for the qualities they have got. But once they are on station, I think it is knocked out of them, there is pressure from the older guys, the ones approaching retirement, who just want to sit on the truck." [176]*

There are nuances in how the organisation has therefore developed in terms of community safety and the target culture that has emerged. While firefighters are delivering HSAs, participants described firefighters treating this as a tick-box exercise while awaiting more 'exciting' operational work. Suggesting firefighters potentially see this as an add-on to their primary role and while they are not resisting these changes, there is a passive ambivalence in how these employees go about these changes to their roles. Target cultures and similar negative impacts on other emergency service employees have been identified in the broader literature (Wankhade, 2016; Guilfoyle, 2012; Wankhade and Patnaik, 2020; Wankhade and Brinkman, 2014).

Managerial recognition for community safety

One issue that has emerged from the changes was the perceived lack of managerial recognition for community safety employees. Some participants described how they felt the organisation did not recognise or perhaps realise how the community safety work has evolved or grown over the last decade, with employees now undertaking a wider variety of prevention work.

"There is a lack of realisation by the Fire Service of what we really do and that, more than anything else, they don't know the depths and the lengths and everything else we actually do, and I think they've lost sight of how advocacy or community safety has grown. It's immense now compared as to where it was before. But it still seems to be at the same level, and it's not." [151]

Furthermore, a few participants explained in more depth that they felt that the senior managers had never experienced some of the situations they had worked in, nor the lone working with vulnerable people. They felt that while senior managers would say that they had been out and had experienced the Home Safety Assessments, participants felt this was under false conditions such as going out with a crew on a fire engine, rather than experiencing the lone working where they are the "local everything" to vulnerable people.

"They said "Yeah, I've been out." I said "No you haven't. You've never, ever done what we've done. You've gone out for a day with a crew, where you've got all of your band of men. You can play off each other. You have banter. The job's almost on the side because you've got your mates with it. You have never, year on year on year, been lone working through all weathers, with ladders, fitting smoke alarms, dealing with the sort of stuff that we've done." Nobody, actually, has ever done this before. We are the first ones to do it. So, don't tell me you know what it's like, because you absolutely do not. Don't tell me about carers doing the same because they don't. They have set clients; they go in and do what they do. We're completely different. When we go in we are the local priest, the local everything to the people, they want to unload and it's very difficult." [136]

All of the community safety participants described how they felt proud of the work they were doing and the successes they have brought to the organisation. However, participants explained that they felt that's managers did not recognise the work they were doing or may just pay lip service. This was further accentuated when the organisation won awards for community safety work. Some participants expressed that they felt the managers were rubbing awards in their faces but did not give any recognition to the community safety employees for the work they had put in that had enabled the winning of the award.

"We all, we like our jobs, we do our jobs because we care. And I'm proud to work for the Fire Service, but sometimes they don't know how to treat people. We are human beings, and they don't know. Honestly, we get the green alert, and there they all are posing with this award. And you know what? It's us that have been out in the rain, talking to these desperate people. We're the people who've done everything what we said, and they're stood there holding that." [151]

Overall, these findings emphasise the ambiguities in the perceptions of how the fire service has changed and evolved. Participants identified a mixed picture, with discussions relating to how senior managers appeared proud to win awards for the community safety work, but some participants in the community safety element of this organisation felt that this did not always translate into the staff feeling that their contribution to the work was valued or recognised.

Issues of pay difference and career progression

One issue identified in the analysis was differences and perceptions of inequity in pay and career progression between operational and community safety roles. Participants explained that due to the organisational changes in this FRS, new roles have been developed in the community safety department. These community safety roles are classified within the organisation as 'support staff' and are 'non-operational' employees. Many participants

highlighted the differences between operational and support roles and most notably, that the organisation is divided by grey and green book terms and conditions. Where the 'grey book' roles are operational firefighters and the 'green book' roles are support staff. Participants identified that there was a division between these two types of roles and was associated with a perceived inequity towards 'support staff'.

> *"That's basically down to a kind of inequality within the workplace really. You can't have a culture that is for all until you get those things in line because you are separated by what they call green book and grey book terms and conditions" [122]*

Many participants felt disappointment in the division between operational and support employees regarding pay and financial remuneration for their work. Participants expressed that the difference between them was unfair, especially when community safety employees could be saving as many lives as operational firefighters.

> *"I would argue that a person could be saving as many lives doing a job in prevention, as a firefighter is on station going on shift." [122]*

A number of participants explained that lower and middle managers that are classified as 'support staff' in the community safety department would receive less pay than firefighters and would have to work for longer than firefighters without receiving the same pension benefits. This was even though they are involved in significant projects and may have more drive and ambition than the firefighter. A number of participants highlighted the financial pressures associated with the low pay of working in community safety. In one case, a participant explained that they were forced to sell personal items just to survive financially. A few participants highlighted this was more of a most recent concern with the national strikes being conducted by firefighters over pensions. Where the current FBU strike campaign was associated with feelings of lesser importance of 'support staff' even though they are contributing to something just as essential to save lives:

> *"It doesn't matter as much when times are good, but when times are bad, the differences are highlighted. I think at the moment people are more conscious of that, especially when you have National Strikes and people moaning about pensions, and moaning about retirement age, because they forget that their colleagues as support staff are going to be working far past when they're being asked to work. Their [support staff] pension is far different and on a far less wage, and they don't have the ability to do two jobs that a lot of the firefighters do." [151]*

While participants expressed that community safety employees were paid less than their operational colleagues, some participants raised concerns over an inequity of advancement opportunities for support staff in community safety. Participants stated that they would appreciate the opportunity to progress in the organisation but felt that they were unable to do so.

> *"That is the problem for someone in my position; I'd love to progress ... I'm looking to climb the ladder in community safety. I don't think the ladder would go all the way to the top, I think it would go so far." [187]*

Participants also expressed that there was a difference towards career progression for community safety employees. In one instance, a participant discussed how they might have ambition and motivation to achieve and progress but because they are not operationally trained there are limited opportunities for them to progress. Furthermore, some participants emphasised that they felt that roles in community safety were being in a sense ring-fenced for operational employees who want to progress their careers and would "move on" after a few projects into a station manager role.

> *"A manager was expressing their concerns that there was a chance of making a role non-operational. They were from a firefighter background and he was adamant and very of the stance that community safety will not ever be able to attract operational guys into the department if they did that. I wanted to say to him "what about us, you're fighting the operational guys court, they have got a career ladder as long as your arm to climb, they can climb up through the firefighting ranks, they can get to watch manager, they can go into CFP, they can go onto station manager, they can then progress through training, there are so many avenues for an operational guy to climb the ladder if he wants to." [176]*

Some participants felt that some operational managers misunderstood the role support staff play in the organisation. In one case, a participant discussed how some managers might be 'offended' if a support employee wanted to progress and if then, that employee had to leave the organisation to do so. This misunderstanding was associated with being demotivating for employees in support roles, and this had meant the organisation had lost talented employees. A number of participants discussed that if employees are being recruited just to do a job and are not motivated to progress and do well, then this could lead to reduced performance for the organisation through a lack of talented and motivated employees.

> *"I think the risk of that is if you just employ people who want to do a job and that's it, and they haven't got any ambitions, then you are aiming for mediocrity in a lot of ways because you've got people who come in, do their job, go home, and that's it." [133]*

Overall, these findings further emphasise and illuminate the nuances involved in the changing fire service. While the community safety work has developed and expanded into a new frontline service, issues are emerging including the differences between operational and community safety employees, with community safety employees receiving less pay and facing difficulty in progressing their careers in comparison to operational firefighters. These findings also suggest that perceived inequity in terms of pay and career progression can lead to lower levels of motivation and increased levels of employee turnover, which could have a negative impact on the organisation through the loss of knowledge. These findings echo the broader organisational justice literature, which has identified that perceived reward and procedural fairness in organisations is associated with broader organisational outcomes such as performance and job satisfaction (Cohen-Charash and Spector, 2001; Laundon, Cathcart and McDonald, 2019; Greenberg and Colquitt, 2013).

Physical split between community safety and operational

The physical split between community safety and operational employees and the lack of opportunity for these groups to work together acted as a mechanism to support the ambivalence in engagement with the changes. Participants described how the community safety would work in the upstairs of some of the fire stations in this case study organisation, and operational firefighters would be on the ground floor.

> *"I work upstairs, the operational guys downstairs, it's only occasionally people I know will pop their head round the door. So I think that community safety and operational is quite split these days" [176]*

Some participants expressed that the relationship between the two sides of the organisation was not always pleasant. Some participants discussed that at the start of these changes, the attitude towards them was unpleasant. However, this was explained by a number of participants to have improved over time, but tensions still existed.

> *"There have been multiple discussions, debates and arguments about who should be doing what and who should be going where. It is always that tension between stations and community safety"* [154]

This friction present between the operational department and the community safety department was due to the limited amount of work these do together and because of the lack of shared facilities and workspaces between the two departments. This friction and tension were highlighted by some participants to be supporting the lack of understanding of what community safety was bringing to the organisation and linked to the theme around recognition of community safety employees.

Workplace stress

The evolution of the role of the FRS and the developing roles of FRS employees was associated by participants to be linked with increases in the experience of workplace stress. Participants identified this increase as a product of the emotionally draining aspects of the roles (such as working with vulnerable people), the increase in demands and workload, the target driven climate and lack of managerial support. Participants described the community safety work to be a critical source of 'stress', with the wide range of vulnerable cases that community safety advocates have to deal with being closely associated to 'emotionally draining'.

> *"I had one day where I was given three domestic violence visits, which turned out to be quite, quite unpleasant because what's happening to the people involved. Then I had a home oxygen user. Then a family with under-fives, which was incredibly refreshing because it was an ordinary visit, and then I had to finish the day by going and seeing a very difficult to handle young fire setter. So to get three domestic violence, a home oxygen user whose husband had come home from the hospital for an hour and got rushed back in, so she was in bits, by the time I go home my head was absolutely, seriously, I was absolutely mulch."* [146]

Community safety participants highlighted increasing workloads and demands as their work evolved. There was difficulty in fitting visits in because of the varied community safety work they were undertaking, such as school visits, home safety assessments, domestic violence visits and firesetters. Participants reported that the demands of targets accentuated this feeling of pressure. In one case, a participant described how they had to hit targets while their workload had increased by 50% in the last year.

> *"When I leave here, I won't be able to do any HSAs because I've got a school in [location]. I've got a double school, so two Key Stage 2s, back to back. So you do an hour, you have a five-minute break, then you've got another hour. So it's very difficult to do all of this, and hit your targets, because of the way things are … But I think this year we've been set up to fail … It's meant doing extra hours, it's meant doing extra work to get things done. But I'm passionate about what I do … but I'm finding it harder and harder."* [136]

Participants described the negative impact of the pressure of targets on the employees and their work across both operational and community safety roles. The focus on targets and goals acted as a mechanism and driver for employees to 'focus on the numbers' and rush the delivery of HSAs. Participants expressed that there was a lack of support from managers on these issues and an increase in pressure from managers at all levels to hit their individual performance targets. These findings echo those found within the literature, where an increase in demands has been widely found to be a principal source of stress (Rowlands and Rees, 2015; Foy *et al.*, 2019; Badu *et al.*, 2020; Brookes *et al.*, 2013; Cooper, 2012; D'Aleo *et al.*,

2007; Colligan and Higgins, 2006; Clarke and Cooper, 2000). Furthermore, higher levels of workplace stress have been found to be linked to negative health outomces in fire service personnel (Soteriades *et al.*, 2019).

> *"We had a meeting last week, and the lead advocate explained to us straight away "Your workload had increased by 50% plus, but we've worked it out and unfortunately, that's not enough for us to be able to hit the target, so we need you to try harder". Then their manager said "Yeah, and if you really push and you really get through, we'll be able to go and help the others in other areas. Won't that be good?" And we just looked at them like something's gone wrong, because you just think, we can't do it." [136]*

There was a consensus amongst the data that there is an association between the cold calling, the targets being set and feelings of stress. Many participants described the difficulty in cold calling on individuals and the pressure of trying to reach their targets. Some participants explained that they may have visited ten houses in a day, but as they only got in 3, the rest of their work goes unrecognised when it comes to evaluating their work performance.

> *"Cold calling is another huge one. For instance, we've just taken on two new young members of staff. They are fabulous, and for the first few weeks they work together. They've had one day of cold calling on their own, and both of them already said, "Gosh". Because they have had appointments up until then, so you know you're going to get in. But they're saying no. "You know, I knocked at ten, and I've only got in at three." But if they're not in you can't get in." [146]*

Discussion and conclusions

This paper has presented several emerging workforce issues in the evolution of the UK FRS. While the broader programme of changes relating to the introduction of prevention work have been identified as being successful (Arch and Thurston, 2013; Andrews, 2010), this paper identifies that there are nuances in the understanding of these changes in the FRS. In particular, there is an ambivalence to an extent to how far the fire services have evolved with the prevention agenda and the engagement with the changes. This ambivalence is identified through several mechanisms, including the differences in the delivery of the HSAs between community safety and 'operational' employees, managerial recognition of community safety, and the differences present between operational and community safety ('support') employees. Furthermore, participants associated the expansion of community safety and the target-led culture with increasing demands, pressures and workplace stress.

The findings of this paper contribute to the growing literature on stress and psychological well-being for FRS employees. Previous research has identified the risks to psychological health from responding to emergency situations (Brunsden, Hill and Maguire, 2014), with the 'watch' or team providing social support which maintains a degree of resilience (Hill and Brunsden, 2009). However, in this case, community safety employees do not have the same degree of social support that maintains this resilience while lone-working and responding to 'emotionally draining' cases. Previous research has demonstrated the positive effects of social support on workplace stress (Foy *et al.*, 2019; Thoits, 1985; Turner, 1981),while this is an area that should be considered for further research, initial recommendations for practice would be for managers of FRS to ensure that they have in place support to ensure their employees are not negatively affected.

The issues of pay differences and career progression, i.e. the lack of a 'career ladder' for community safety employees, highlights the tensions in the evolving nature of the FRS. These findings have a significant implication for management practices in the emergency services, due to the implications on the motivation and retention of employees. The lack of career

progression and lower pay was associated with increased levels of turnover and demotivated employees. High turnover and demotivated staff are associated with poor organisational outcomes (Alcoba and Phinaitrup, 2020; Stritch, Molina and Favero, 2018; Fernet *et al.*, 2015; Bellé, 2013). These findings further resonate with the literature on organisational justice (Laundon, Cathcart and McDonald, 2019; Cohen-Charash and Spector, 2001), and there is scope for further research to be undertaken from an organisational justice perspective in the FRS that could develop fruitful recommendations for management practices in the PRS. In the meantime, based on the findings of this paper and the broader literature, the FRS may find it worthwhile to remove the barriers community safety employees face in their organisations, especially as these roles are becoming a new 'front line' for the FRS and responding to complex and vulnerable cases. By addressing these practices in the FRS, it is likely to sustain a motivated workforce and limit the costs of employee turnover.

The English FRS have undergone significant reforms as part of the New Labour government's modernisation agenda which sort to improve the working practices within the FRS (Andrews, 2010). This modernisation agenda towards greater managerialism could be a possible explanation for the emerging issues and tension evidenced in this study. The increasing demands and use of performance targets were associated by employees with increased feelings of stress and with a diminishing effect on work quality with some groups of FRS employees 'focussing on the numbers' rather than quality to meet targets. These findings have important implications in the understanding of managerialism reform in the FRS in England, and complement the existing literature on broader performance management and accountability of FRS across the UK (Taylor, Greenhalgh and Murphy, 2019; Spencer *et al.*, 2019; Murphy and Greenhalgh, 2013). In particular, future research would be useful in the FRS to examine employee psychological wellbeing, service quality and these reforms further.

The findings of this paper provide insight into broader FRS changes and pressures over the last decade. Since 2010, FRSs across England have had to contend with the coalition and conservative government's austerity programme and reduced funding (Spencer *et al.*, 2019; Murphy and Ferry, 2018). The National Audit Office (2015) reported that prevention activities by the Fire and Rescue Services had fallen by 30% between 2011 and 2015. The findings of this paper may provide some insight into the reasons behind this reduction. For instance, the issues around the lack of recognition for community safety activities and the tensions between operational and community safety employees could have influenced cost-saving decisions. The National Audit Office (2015) reported that the majority of cost savings had come from employee expenditure, and thus, given the ambivalence towards the evolution towards community safety, these activities could have been seen as an easy option for cutting costs by some managers. Further research in this area is essential to investigate this further.

It is important to take note of the limitations of this study; the findings are from a qualitative case study involving one particular FRS in England. The experiences of the participants and findings are situated in the context of this particular organisation. Further research would be useful in identifying whether the findings are transferable and similar to other FRS and other emergency services. However, it is important to note that other emergency services and organisations are experiencing similar pressures and target cultures, and findings from the broader theoretical literature provide support to the findings of this study (Wankhade, 2016; Wankhade and Patnaik, 2020; McCann *et al.*, 2015; Fernet *et al.*, 2015; Rowlands and Rees, 2015). Therefore, it is likely that the broader implications of the findings could be transferable to other organisations and situations.

To conclude, this paper has identified some of the emerging issues in the management of the FRS in England. The analysis has illuminated the perceived inequities between operational

firefighters and community safety employees, particularly around the defined career ladder and pay. These findings pose significant implications for managers of FRS in retaining and motivating their employees and addressing issues of psychological well-being and stress. Finally, the FRS should recognise the valuable contribution their community safety colleagues make to their organisations and the community they serve, further research to understand the experiences of community safety employees across broader FRS would be a useful research agenda.

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