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## MANAGING VOLUNTEER RETENTION THROUGH SOCIALISATION – A STUDY OF VOLUNTEERS IN AN AUSTRALIAN EMERGENCY SERVICE AGENCY [ABSTRACT]

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### ABSTRACT

Aim/Purpose	In many OECD countries, emergency response relies on volunteers, and while emergency incidents are increasing, volunteer numbers are declining. Volunteer turnover occurs at various stages of the volunteering life cycle (i.e., recruitment, training, socialisation, performance, and retirement), the socialisation stage has the greatest impact on organisations, as it occurs after the allocation of resources and training, but before the investment is returned through volunteer performance. There is sparse literature exploring this stage.
Background	Addressing the gap, this paper presents a model of volunteer retention, predicting acceptance, social-expulsion, or self-exclusion, based on social fit.
Methodology	The model is based on an inductive examination of the processes of volunteer turnover during socialisation of emergency service volunteers. Using a grounded theory approach, focus groups and interviews were conducted with 157 volunteers across seven locations.
Contribution	This model contributes to theory by categorising volunteer turnover according to the stages of the volunteering life cycle, and to practice by drawing attention to the need to consider social fit prior to investing in new volunteer training and understanding the role of leadership intervention pre- and post-training.
Findings	The study identifies the processes of volunteer turnover and predicts that volunteers either stay or leave based on the level of their social fit.

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Keywords volunteer retention, volunteer turnover, volunteering life cycle, socialisation grounded theory

## BIOGRAPHIES

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**Michael Jones** (BComm (hons), PhD.) has been an academic teaching and researching in areas of organization, business and management for fifteen years. Michael has developed research interests in the following areas: organizational psychology and behavior – looking at commitment and motivation and group dynamics. Michael also has research strengths in areas of qualitative analysis and has written several papers on various qualitative methodologies and methods. Michael is interested in research areas such as doctoral studies, organizational culture, and motivation and commitment. Michael is a co-investigator on a major research project exploring retention and engagement in Emergency Management Agencies.

Michael is a member of the Australia and New Zealand Academy of Management, the Australian Human Resources Institute, and the Industrial Relations Society of Australia



**Dr Yoke Berry** was Project Manager for a Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre grant in the Faculty of Business, University of Wollongong. In this function she contributed to research into retention and engagement of volunteers in emergency service agencies.

Yoke has a PhD in Chemistry and has extensive experience in natural products, organic and protein chemistry. She is a qualified secondary school educator in science.



**Irit Alony** is an experienced business researcher with a broad range of social research skills, including innovative methods which quantify qualitative data. She is an expert on workplace relationships, particularly for the purpose of increasing employee retention and reducing employee burnout, and has experience in consulting and stakeholder management in government and private organisations. Irit is currently an adjunct post doctoral researcher in the Australian Health Services Research Institute (AHSRI) at the University of Wollongong.