Fire and Emergency Service Leadership: Fact or Fiction?

An investigation into learning and development options in leadership for volunteer firefighters

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"Vision without action is a dream…
Action without vision is a nightmare."

Japanese Proverb

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Churchill Fellow Bio



A volunteer firefighter with the South Australian Country Fire Service (CFS) since 2012, Haydn has witnessed frontline leadership from some uniquely challenging perspectives. None more so than during the Black Summer of 2019 - 2020 whilst working in NSW, at the Adelaide Hills - Cudlee Creek fire and also at the equally tragic Kangaroo Island fires. As an adult educator interested in how people learn for leadership, the lack of any nationally consistent leadership learning pathway for Australian volunteer firefighters stood out to Haydn as a severe and systemic national capability gap.

Service has been the hallmark of Haydn's career, spanning the Australian Regular Army, the South Australia Police, and most recently, the Australian Border Force, where 2021 marked his 36th year in uniform. As a professional learning and development facilitator since 2010, he has delivered entry-level recruit and frontline supervisory leadership learning at various locations around Australia and in Papua New Guinea.

As a consultant, Haydn designs and provides bespoke leadership learning experiences for various federal and state regulatory and emergency service agencies. These focus on team building and assisting leaders to sharpen their focus towards creating effective, positive, psychologically safe, and engaging working environments.

Advocating for lifelong learning has always been Haydn's mantra, and, true to form, he has worked hard to live up to this. In 2018 he completed an M.Ed. (research) at the University of South Australia, focused on exploring learning for ethical leadership in law enforcement and regulatory environments. Continuing his learning journey, Haydn has recently commenced a PhD at Griffith University to research organisational culture and its impact on interoperability across the regulatory – emergency services – law enforcement – military spectrum. Please feel free to contact Haydn via: haydn.mccomas@gmail.com

Opening Comments

During the Australian Black Summer fires of 2019 – 20, I witnessed frontline leadership from some uniquely challenging perspectives as a volunteer with the South Australian Country Fire Service. Whilst working on the fireground and talking with colleagues during brief moments of rest, the following question occurred to me: '*How can we realistically send our emergency service volunteers into such stressful situations and expect them to effectively lead teams with little or no investment towards their leadership development? There must be a better way!'* It was this thought that inspired me to apply for a Churchill Fellowship.

I have purposely crafted this report to bridge the gap between the theorist and practitioner worlds. As a result, this paper sits between the opposing trenches of the those that are engaged in thinking/planning and those operational/first responders who go into harm's way. This emergency services *No Man's Land* can be an uncomfortably lonely place. But nevertheless, if we are to achieve positive change, the theorist/thinkers and those who wear the ash and sweat stained PPE must ultimately come together.

As we prepare for future disasters, we overlook effective investment in leadership development for Australian emergency service volunteers at our own peril. Ignoring this need would represent the ultimate failure of leadership.

Acknowledgements

I want to acknowledge the Board Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Board for awarding me a 2020 Churchill Fellowship. This Fellowship has allowed me resources to research leadership development options for volunteer Australian fire and other emergency service personnel. This is an area of distinct and critical need, particularly evidenced by the circumstances faced by volunteer firefighters during our black summer bushfires of 2019 – 20.

Through my Churchill Fellowship, I have strengthened connections with colleagues and built new networks with those involved in firefighter leadership development in New Zealand, the United States, Canada, Denmark, and the Philippines. Firefighters and non-firefighter staff from around the globe have shared with me that which they have discovered around developing their leaders and supporting their people. In many instances, they have willingly shared the not-so great stories about their own agency *'mea culpa'* moments that became drivers of positive change.

I wish to acknowledge the dedication and professionalism of all those whom I met along the way. Particularly the members of Fire & Emergency New Zealand, CAL FIRE, The US National Interagency Fire Center and the Great Basin Smokejumpers, The US National Parks Service, The US Forest Service, the New Jersey Forest Fire Service, The US National Fire Academy, The Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs, the East Gwillimbury Fire Department, the Chippewas of Rama First Nation Fire Department, Mr Phil Dawson (in Ontario), The Danish Emergency Management Agency, the Philippine Bureau of Fire Protection, and the Philippine National Public Safety College, Manila. I would also like to acknowledge the support of colleagues in Australia and elsewhere, especially:

- Aaron Tucker – for first proposing that I had an idea worth pursuing as a Churchill Fellowship and then continuing the journey with me as my Mentor.
- Brett Liebich – (formerly of the Australian Border Force) for supporting my application as my personal sponsor.
- Mark Jones – (Chief Officer of Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service & formerly the Chief Officer of the South Australian Country Fire Service), for supporting my application as my project sponsor; and
- My dearest and oldest friend, Dr Grant Pink, for his careful thoughts, sage advice, and encouragement. *'Whatever I do for my brother – surely my brother would do the same for me?'*

I would like to thank my family for their love, support, and patience – my Dear Wife, life partner, Valerie, and my Dearest Son, Jarrad. So many times, I have ventured solo far from home in search of adventure – and never once has either of you even entertained the thought of holding me back. If that's not love, then I don't know what is.

Glossary & Abbreviations

ACE	American Council on Education
ACES	Analytical – Conceptual – Emotional – Spiritual (leadership model)
AIDR	Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience
ALRF	Leading Rural Leadership Foundation
BLM	Bureau of Land Management (US Govt.)
C2	Command & Control
CAL FIRE	California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection
CFA	Country Fire Authority (Victoria)
CFS	Country Fire Service (South Australia)
CIFS	Copenhagen Institute for Futures Studies (Denmark)
'Dark Quad' (behaviours)	Hazing, bullying, sexual harassment, sexual assault - the behaviours that occur in fire services, which collectively bring the *'mea culpa'* moment to fruition.
DEMA	Danish Emergency Management Agency
EGFD	East Gwillimbury Fire Department (Ontario, Canada)
FENZ	Fire and Emergency New Zealand
GMPDP	Group Manager Professional Development Program (UFBA, NZ)
HAZMAT	Hazardous Materials Response
HELITAC *(aka HELITACK)*	Helicopter Wildfire Response Crew & Aircraft
IDPs	Individual Development Plans
ILF	Incident Leadership Framework
Kaumātua	A Kaumātua is a respected Māori tribal elder who has been involved with their whanau (community) for many years. Appointed as chosen elders, they teach and guide both current and future generations
L&D	Learning & Development
LARC	Leading Australian Resilient Communities
LDF	Leadership Development Framework
'Mea Culpa' (moment)	Public exposure of widespread bullying, hazing, sexual harassment, and/or sexual assault within a fire service. Usually unexpected, but always explosive. Guaranteed to damage agency reputation, potentially irreparably.
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer
NFA	National Fire Academy (USA)
NIFC	National Interagency Fire Centre (Boise, Idaho, USA)
NJFFS	New Jersey Forest Fire Service (USA)
NPS	National Parks Service (USA)
NPWSSA	National Parks & Wildlife South Australia
NWCG	National Wildfire Coordinating Group (USA)

NZSAR	New Zealand Search & Rescue
OAFC	Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs
OFM	Ontario Fire Marshal
PBFP	Philippines Bureau of Fire Protection
PIED	Perceived Investment in Employee Development
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
PPSC	Philippine Public Safety College
RFS	Rural Fire Service (New South Wales)
SAFECOM	South Australian Fire & Emergency Services Commission
SESVA	State Emergency Service Volunteers Association
SLII®	Situational Leadership 2 (Ken Blanchard Companies)
SLP	Situational Leadership Package (CAL FIRE)
TLC	Team Leadership Course (Danish Emergency Management Agency – DEMA)
UFBA	United Fire Brigades' Association (NZ)
USAR	Urban Search & Rescue
USFS	United States Forest Service
VLDP	Volunteer Leadership Development Program (FENZ)
VUCA	Volatile – Uncertain – Complex – Ambiguous (environments)
VSOs	Volunteer Support Officers (FENZ)

Executive Summary

Introduction

Between August and October 2022, I undertook a 55-day round-the-world Churchill Fellowship research journey across NZ, the USA, Canada, Denmark, and the Philippines. I undertook this research because Australian volunteer firefighters lead emergency response teams in various situations, interoperating with partner agencies and increasingly across state and international jurisdictions (CoA, 2016). Those without specific leadership qualifications often fill frontline and senior leadership roles (McLennan & Birch, 2005). This Churchill Fellowship research is intended to offer strategic insight and impetus toward achieving better leadership development towards sustainable voluntary emergency services across Australia.

Background

In January 2020, The Productivity Commission found that Australia's volunteer firefighting force declined by 10% (about 16,000 volunteers) in the past decade (Karp, 2020). This decline has now been assessed as a significant risk to disaster mitigation (Darling, 2022; CoA, 2020a). About half of all emergency service volunteers leave within the first two years (Jones & Berry, 2017), often citing poor leadership and toxic culture as factors (Sakkal, 2019; Birch, 2011 p. 9; McLennan *et al*., 2009). Notwithstanding the importance of effective leadership (Baxter-Tomkins & Wallace, 2009), Australia lacks a defined leadership development pathway for fire service volunteers. This is despite the fact that whilst paid staff will abide by poor leadership in trade for payment, the same cannot be said for volunteers, where the "…exchange is much more precarious, and tolerance for poor leadership does not endure." (Jones *et al.*, 2015, p. 2).

Five key emergent themes

As a result of this research, five key volunteer emergency services leadership development themes have emerged:

1. **The *'Mea Culpa'* moment** – where the critically explosive public reporting of widespread poor leadership behaviour can be attributed to a failure to invest in leadership development. In New Zealand, the USA, Canada as well as Australia, shameful circumstances involving the *'dark quad'* behaviours of bullying, hazing, sexual harassment, and/or sexual assault have occurred. Fire services are universally loved and consistently rate highly in public trust sentiment surveys (IPSOS, 2021; Seven, 2021). Yet, multiple events of bullying, hazing, sexual harassment, and/or sexual assault in fire services exist, sometimes festering over many years. The common causative factors being no leadership learning investment, and a failure of leaders at all levels to stringently enforce standards to the point that the agency's social licence may be voided.

2. **Knowing our people** – and the importance of measuring and assessing staff/volunteer engagement and satisfaction towards driving leadership development initiatives. Some volunteer fire and emergency service agencies invest significantly towards understanding their people, how their volunteering is going and what aspects of the environment are potentially hindering or limiting their sense of commitment. This theme connects directly with theme 1: The *'Mea Culpa'* moment, because if senior leaders had clear empirical insights, this critical moment would perhaps not have evolved to an explosive crisis point. Additionally, publicly available reporting leads to an atmosphere of openness and transparency which builds public confidence and strengthens the agency's social licence. If we don't know and understand how our people are travelling, we are effectively flying blind.

3. **Leadership models** – and the critical need to select a workable theoretical model towards an integrated fire service leadership learning system. Any leadership development system should be underpinned by a theoretical framework. Oftentimes larger organisations cobble together leadership learning units into stages with no common theoretical scaffolding. During my research, two large organisations emerged as having successfully integrated Situational Leadership (SL) as their flagship model: CAL FIRE and the Danish Emergency Management Agency (DEMA). This has proven to be very successful, particularly given that SL also offers a way of communication and positions the leader as a coach, which aligns well with the operational nature of fire and emergency organisations. What is clear is that effective leadership development must be a part of a bigger system, and not series of disconnected elements. Commencing with new recruits, whatever model is selected must align with a sense of service through *'followership'* and be directly linked to agency values.

4. **Leadership development placement** – In fire services worldwide the operational training portfolio generally assumes control of all learning, including leadership development. As operational training demands continue to expand, so does the impact on precious volunteer time, leaving little appetite for non-operational strategic offerings. In such circumstances, resource hungry non-operational learning, such as leadership development, becomes a lower priority because *'training our people to put wet stuff on red stuff is simply more important at the moment…'*, and strategic leadership development becomes *'…something that we'll get to when we have time'*. However, this is not the only option available. CAL FIRE elected to place responsibility for leadership learning with their Professional Standards team because this team was considered uniquely placed to understand the issues. This has proven highly effective and adds significant gravitas to the reinforcement of learning around agency values. The leadership development piece should be elevated to be the highest form of learning achievement for volunteer fire services.

5. **Leadership learning connection** – Should leadership learning be an internal offering, or should it be externally delivered, assessed, and certified? Is it better to involve external facilitators, or are internal training staff up to the task? A particularly challenging element in this theme relates to identifying suitably skilled leadership learning facilitators. This is because the skill set required for deeply reflective group-based learning is significantly different and much more nuanced than the delivery of rote technical training. Such a level of professional facilitation may require externally contracted facilitators; however, whether such facilitators will possess enough contextual credibility remains to be seen. For volunteer fire and emergency services, one of the most difficult and vexed questions is whether leadership certification should be made compulsory for leadership roles. Particularly noting that in dealing with volunteers, fire and emergency service agencies have no sticks – but only carrots to use. Nevertheless, given the human and reputational costs arising from such *'Mea Culpa'* moments, at some point it is likely that all aspiring volunteer emergency service leaders will require some form of certification before taking on such roles. It is possibly only a matter of time before some court, Royal Commission, or other enquiry questions why emergency service agencies hadn't moved on this need earlier.

Recommendations

As a result of undertaking this Churchill Fellowship to explore learning and development options in leadership for volunteer firefighters a total of 14 recommendations have emerged:

Leadership Learning and Development

1. Leadership development should become a volunteer life cycle learning journey, commencing at the volunteer firefighter recruit stage. Moreover, it should be closely aligned with the agency's values and the enforcement of its standards. The intent is to equally position effective leadership alongside workplace safety in the minds and hearts of all fire and emergency service volunteers.

2. Leadership learning experiences for volunteer firefighters should incorporate the use of Individual Development Plans, personal reflective journals, a structured mentoring program and the establishment of a regionally based leadership round-table concept. The intent is to deliver longitudinally impactful leadership development that repositions attitudes and reshapes personal action towards creating high performing volunteer fire service teams.

3. Volunteer fire and emergency service agencies should invest in developing a cadre of internally credible leadership learning facilitators with the skills required to deliver meaningful leadership educative experiences. The intent is to build internal facilitated adult learning expertise that goes beyond the operational training skillset.

4. Careful consideration be given to the impact of literacy on volunteer leadership development programs. Given that volunteer fire and emergency services do not generally assess literacy at recruitment, some volunteers may find writing intensive leadership development programs challenging. The intent is to ensure that high performing volunteers with excellent leadership potential are not disadvantaged or dissuaded from participating or progressing.

Leadership Quality

5. Australia should establish a national learning academy to deliver multi-modal leadership development programs for volunteer firefighters and other emergency services personnel. The intent is to build effective, robust, inclusive, and high-performing local brigades to attract and retain new volunteers.

6. A nationally consistent and accredited volunteer firefighter leadership learning curriculum and learning system be established to ensure volunteer leaders are appropriately skilled and competent to lead teams. The intent is to build a common national leadership development standard in the most efficient way possible, including sharing learning concepts and materials between agencies.

7. A framework to transition long term fire service volunteers from senior leadership positions into esteemed elders and mentors (*Kaumātua*) should be developed. The intent is to make space for and provide support to younger emergent leaders, whilst at the same time safeguarding the storehouse of agency knowledge and collective wisdom. This will enable older volunteers to gracefully relinquish leadership roles yet retain a significant and honourable place from which to positively contribute to the agency.

Research

8. Volunteer fire and emergency service agencies build a robust internal research capacity to measure and assess volunteer sentiment in a timely way. Such capacity should be founded through partnerships with reputable academic institutions and/or researchers with relevant deep subject expertise. The intent is to understand the volunteer workforce and the operating environment to guide good decision-making.

9. Volunteer fire and emergency service agencies develop an anticipatory leadership capability within their senior leadership teams. Such capacity should be aligned towards using empirical research to guide both project environmental and organisational change. The intent is to ensure that our national emergency response capacity remains fit for purpose and strategically sound.

10. Empirical research undertaken by volunteer fire and emergency service agencies should be publicly accessible. The intent is to create a spirit of openness and transparency towards reinforcing public trust and building social licence for volunteer emergency response agencies.

Governance

11. The previously recommended national learning academy should feature nodes based in each state and territory to act as campuses (real or virtual). The intent being to ensure the relevant state emergency services portfolio leadership team develops a sense of ownership and ensure progress accountability.

12. Agency responsibility for volunteer firefighter leadership development should be placed with professional standards. The intent is to link leadership development with professional behaviour and also to ensure that operational training demands cannot overwhelm or sideline leadership development due to misplaced priority perceptions.

Policy

13. The National Council for fire and emergency services in Australia and New Zealand (AFAC) should commission a strategic white paper on fire and emergency service leadership development. The intent is to kick-start a national conversation about volunteer emergency service leadership quality, particularly in light of the recent Australian *'Mea Culpa'* moments and potential links to historically inadequate investment in frontline emergency services leadership development.

14. Any such Academy established (as per Recommendation 5) should be pursued as a partnership with Fire and Emergency New Zealand (FENZ). Such a trans-Tasman collaboration would then enable delivery of fire and emergency service leadership development for Pacific nations towards building cooperation and strengthening capacity. The intent is to develop a joint capability that efficiently contributes to regional security and disaster mitigation (AP4D, 2022).

***

My Churchill Fellowship Journey

My Fellowship research topic was to investigate learning and development options in leadership for volunteer firefighters. My research journey covered over 50,000 km of multi-modal travel across NZ, the USA, Canada, Denmark, and the Philippines, as shown in Figure 1. I interviewed 74 individuals from a wide range of fire & emergency services, government agencies and other learning establishments, as shown in Table 1.

My final itinerary did not include France as was originally planned. This occurred because, despite best efforts, successful contact was not able to be established with the French National Fire Academy. As a result, France was substituted with the Philippines as an alternative destination of potential interest.

Table 1: No. of Interviews conducted by Country & Agency

Country	Dates	Agency	Interviews
New Zealand	14 – 26 Aug 2022	Fire & Emergency New Zealand (FENZ)	17
		Massey University, Joint Centre for Disaster Research	1
		United Fire Brigades Association	2
USA	27 Aug – 09 Sept 2022	The California Department of Forestry & Fire Protection (CAL FIRE)	5
		The National Interagency Fire Centre, Boise Idaho	4
		US National Fire Academy, Emmitsburg Maryland	3
		New Jersey Forest Fire Service	6
		US National Parks Service, Gettysburg	2
		US Forest Service, various locations	5
Canada	10 – 17 Sept 2022	Humber College, Ontario	3
		East Gwillimbury Fire Department, Ontario	4
		Rama, First Nations Fire Department, Ontario	3
		The Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs	2
Denmark	18 – 30 Sept 2022	Copenhagen Institute for Future Studies	1
		Danish Emergency Management Agency (Copenhagen & Tinglev)	9
		Fire & Rescue, Southern Jutland	1
		North Zealand Fire Service	3
Philippines	1 – 8 Oct 2022	Subic Bay Fire Service	1
		Philippine Public Safety College, Manila	2
		Philippine Bureau of Fire Protection	1

I undertook this Churchill Fellowship because Australian volunteer firefighters lead teams in various situations, interoperating with partner agencies and increasingly across state and international jurisdictions (CoA, 2016). However, those without specific leadership qualifications often fill frontline and senior leadership roles (McLennan & Birch, 2005). Indeed, in the case of my home agency, the South Australian Country Fire Service (CFS), frontline leaders experience minimal leadership development. This Churchill Fellowship research is intended to offer strategic insight and impetus toward achieving better leadership development towards sustainable voluntary emergency services across Australia.



Figure 1: Haydn's Churchill Fellowship Journey: 13 Aug – 08 Oct 2022

Background to this research project

Reliance on volunteer firefighters, particularly by the Australian community, was highlighted numerous times during our 'black summer' of 2019-20, with a range of factors suggesting that this reliance will only increase over time (Cull, 2020). More than 195,000 Australians currently serve as volunteer firefighters, as shown below in Figure 2.



Figure 2: Australian Volunteer Firefighter Numbers (Cull, 2020)

Despite their importance, in January 2020, The Productivity Commission found that Australia's volunteer firefighting force declined by 10% (about 16,000 volunteers) in the past decade (Karp, 2020). This decline has now been assessed as a significant risk to disaster mitigation (Darling, 2022; CoA, 2020a).

Researchers estimate that about half of all recruits leave whichever service they join within the first two years (Jones & Berry, 2017), with poor leadership and, in some cases, toxic cultures being cited as specific causative factors (Sakkal, 2019; Birch, 2011 p. 9; McLennan *et al*., 2009). What is clear is that effective volunteer leadership requires highly adaptive interpersonal and facilitative skills (Nisbet & Wallace, 2007) to navigate complex motivations that go far beyond payment (Newstead & Lewis, 2022; Brief, 1998).

Current Australian fire service leadership development offerings

Because effective leadership is crucial for volunteer retention (Baxter-Tomkins & Wallace, 2009), the lack of nationally consistent or defined leadership development pathways for Australian volunteer firefighters is as risky as puzzling. Where paid staff will abide by poor leadership in trade for payment, the same cannot be said for volunteers, where the "…exchange is much more precarious, and tolerance for poor leadership does not endure." (Jones *et al.*, 2015, p. 2).

Some short-burst leadership learning opportunities do exist. Examples include the two-day Volunteer Leadership Program (VLP) offered by the Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience (AIDR 2020) and a two-day Frontline Leadership course offered by the SA Country Fire Service. However, both amount to short attendance-only courses without assessment or the deeper, more longitudinal reflective pedagogical approaches critical to successful leadership learning (Bolden, 2016; Hallqvist, 2014; Alheit & Dausien, 2000). Some longer and potentially more reflective learning experiences are potentially offered to fire and emergency service volunteers. One example is the Leading Australian Resilient Communities (LARC) 5-day leadership program, which is being delivered as part of the Australian Government's Building Resilient Regional Leaders Initiative pilot grant. However, this program is not specifically designed or crafted for emergency service personnel (ARLF, 2022).

> *"Translating learning into behavioural change takes time and a lot of effort. Even more so when it comes to learning crucial skills that impact people. Skills vital to effective leadership, such as time management, communication, emotional intelligence, influencing colleagues, motivating teams, nurturing high-performers, and driving innovation, require more than just a couple of days in a classroom. You're simply not going to change someone's behaviour by sending them on a two-day short course."*
>
> **Sam Bell** (2019) Fellow of the Institute of Managers and Leaders, Australia & NZ

Nevertheless, research suggests that short/burst, lecture-based, classroom delivery leadership programs are marginally effective compared to longitudinally aligned leadership learning experiences (Bell, 2019; Hanson, 2013; Roberts, 2008). The lessons gained from short classroom/lecture-style programs do not endure beyond the program, with participants quickly slipping into old behaviour patterns (Day, 2000). This is particularly relevant if the intent is to prepare emergency service volunteers for leading in stressful and uncertain operational environments, often for days at a time (O'Brien, 2020). Moreover, the lack of cross-agency integrated leadership learning for emergency service volunteers has been previously identified as a barrier to effective service delivery and interoperability between emergency services (NSWAG, 2014; WAAG, 2015). The importance of interoperability is of primacy, particularly in South Australia, as the Australian jurisdiction that fields composite teams of volunteer and professional fire crews together operationally on major interstate emergency deployments and bushfire emergencies (NPWSSA, 2019), as shown in Figure 3.



Figure 3: Volunteer and professional Firefighters jointly crewing an NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS) Truck during the 2019-20 bushfires (NPWSSA, 2019)

Leadership & volunteer emergency service delivery

From an operational perspective, the risks posed by suboptimal leadership and associated decision-making during fire and emergency responses are clear. The U.S. 1994 Colorado South Canyon Fire serves as an informative case study. In this example, overconfidence, poor information exchange and a propensity to unquestioningly follow instructions led to the deaths of 14 wildland firefighters (BLM, 1994). One of the most tragic aspects of this example was that despite good firefighting skills, the disastrous outcome arose from underdeveloped leadership skills, which compounded poor operational decision-making (Useem *et al.*, 2005, p. 477). Closer to home, the SAFECOM Independent Review into South Australia's 2019-20 Bushfire Season report similarly identified the underdevelopment of leadership skills within the CFS volunteer cohort as an emergent risk (SAFECOM 2020, pp. 72-74).

The Australian volunteer firefighter demographic (white, male, and aged 55+) now represents a threat to future strategic disaster firefighting capability simply due to its unsustainable nature (RMIT, 2019 2019). Between 2001 and 2006, the median age of volunteers in the Victorian Country Fire Authority rose from 40 to 46 years. This is a potentially severe limitation for volunteer fire and emergency service organisations, particularly noting the physically demanding nature of the role (BCRC, 2007). Here again, effective leadership is critical to the engagement and retention of younger new volunteers and the sustainability of our volunteer emergency services (Moir, 2018). The challenge for established and traditional volunteer-based organisations, such as fire services, is working out how to adapt and engage new and younger volunteers in the new post COVID environment.

Research also suggests that Australian fire services lag in engaging and recruiting volunteers from diverse backgrounds, including sexual orientation and ethnicity (Young *et al.*, 2018). Similarly, women in volunteer fire services still experience gender-based challenges, including intimidation in training and limited opportunities for leadership advancement (Branch-Smith & Pooley, 2010). Leadership quality emerges as a significant factor with enhanced inclusiveness resulting in increased retention of volunteers, particularly women (McLennan *et al.*, 2009).

Australian emergency service *'Mea Culpa'* moments

In April 2022, the Victorian Country Fire Authority (CFA) tabled a report detailing significant examples of leadership failures away from operations during non-response times (CFA, 2022). This review, known as the External Review of Culture and Issues Management, detailed how substandard and unskilled local leadership led to instances of harm to the volunteer workforce. This included bullying, hazing, sexual harassment, and sexual assault. The report specifically identified inconsistencies in approaches to leadership at various levels of the organisation, alongside many leadership learning opportunities that were disjointed and difficult to access (CFA, 2022, pp. 15 – 16). In doing so, the review panel emphasised the importance of general and broad leadership skills away from the fire ground, particularly noting the impact of these toxic behaviours on volunteer retention and wellbeing.

Similarly, in mid-2021, the NSW Rural Fire Service faced a series of hazing, bullying, sexual harassment, and sexual assault allegations (Kontominas, 2021). As a result, the NSW RFS commissioned a comprehensive Grievance and Discipline Survey, which was undertaken by Clayton Utz and revealed significant previously hidden issues relating to bullying, unfair treatment, and discrimination, in addition to further sexual harassment and sexual assault claims. Within the report, a lack of leadership capability emerged as a perceived precursor issue (NSWRFS, 2021).

In late 2020 the Victorian State Emergency Service Volunteers Association undertook its internal member Conduct and Culture Survey (Vic-SESVA, 2021). The resulting report revealed severe bullying and sexual harassment that targeted not only female members but also LGBTI volunteers. This qualitative review identified significant anxiety, depression and other related mental health conditions arising (Tuohy, 2021). In all three reports, the failure of those with leadership responsibilities is a significant self-evident causative factor. This should be no surprise, given the lack of consistent or coherent leadership development framework or leadership learning offerings across fire and emergency services in Australia. However, the agencies in question do not stand alone in this sense, and this should serve as a call for change as much as it heralds a salient warning.

Effective emergency service leadership learning

Research has established that effective leadership learning unfolds longitudinally across multiple domains involving complex intra and interpersonal processes (Day *et al*., 2014). It involves dynamic interactions between individuals and the relevant social and organisational structures (Day, 2000). Indeed, the idea that leadership development is a simple summative process in which material can be presented and rapidly absorbed by learners has been described as a *'damaging myth'* (Dugan, 2011, p. 80). The literature suggests that the leadership learning being offered needs to connect and align with the ongoing work of each learner, ideally as a set of integrated experiences (Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004). Emergency service leadership learning must also be crafted to equip learners for what the US Army describes as V.U.C.A. environments, which are:

- **Volatile**: featuring rapid large-scale change.
- **Uncertain**: where future prediction is challenging and opaque.
- **Complex**: involving multi-faceted challenges with few simple causes/solutions; and
- **Ambiguous**: where the impacts and even the events are unclear.
  (Petrie 2011, p. 8)

Increasingly, the need for flexible leadership learning solutions is also being recognised. This has led to the emergence and rise of the 'personal learning cloud' (PLC), involving MOOCs (massive online open courses) to deliver micro-credential-based leadership qualifications, in which the learning is:

> **Personalised** - allowing the participant to undertake programs at their own pace, using technology suited to their learning style and working environment.
>
> **Socialised** - enabling the learners to collaborate, share, assist, and solve problems within and across teams.
>
> **Contextualised** – integrating on-the-job relevance to deliver knowledge and skills that are immediately applicable; and
>
> **Authenticated** – where learning carries a certification of skills and capabilities that are immediate, seamless, and verifiable.
> (Moldoveanu & Narayandas 2019)

Emergency service leadership programs commonly carry a highly operational focus. A relevant Australian example is the Incident Leadership Framework (ILF) program designed for the Victorian Country Fire Authority (VCFA) to augment bushfire response roles (Frye, 2012). However, the competencies and skill sets required of future leaders within the volunteer emergency services go far beyond response operations alone. With these circumstances in mind, it may be appropriate to consider a more holistic understanding of leadership development for volunteer emergency service leaders. One example is the Analytical / Conceptual / Emotional / Spiritual (ACES) holistic leadership development model, shown in Table 2.

Table 2: ACES holistic leadership development model
(Quatro *et al.*, 2007, p. 429)

Leadership Domain	Key Skill	Behavioural example
Analytical	Quantitative analysis	Calculating a break-even point
	Logical reasoning	Developing a decision tree
	Decisiveness	Choosing one alternative over another
Conceptual	Qualitative analysis	Balancing stakeholder group needs
	Creativity	Developing a new idea/concept
	Curiosity	Facilitating a brainstorming session
Emotional	Pervasive communication	Aligning a team around a vision
	Empathetic understanding	Actively listening to a grievance
	Self-monitoring	Avoiding unnecessary conflict
Spiritual	Self-reflection	Self-assessing decision making
	Integrity	Assessing values congruence
	Meditative thinking	Deeply considering decision impacts

Here, the complex and interconnected nature of the domains becomes apparent. This is particularly so when contrasted against the efficacy of short, non-assessed, attendance-only leadership courses mentioned earlier in this document. Building on the ACES theme, it has been further proposed that effective and meaningful leadership development experiences that generate lasting change must incorporate the following:

- adequate time to build self-awareness through self-reflection.
- a self-development plan with meaningful learning objectives.
- differentiation between good and excellent leadership performance; and
- on-the-job application of new skills (Genis, 2008, p. 32).

To effectively craft such learning experiences, volunteer emergency service agencies must fully understand the motivations and aspirations of their volunteer workforce. Volunteers are as variable as they are plentiful and it would be unwise for any manager or leader to treat a large volunteer workforce as a single homogeneous group (Wymer, 1998). One way towards understanding the complex yet interconnected nature of volunteer motivation and engagement is through the 'Four Ws of Volunteering' model in Figure 4 (Bussel & Forbes, 2002).

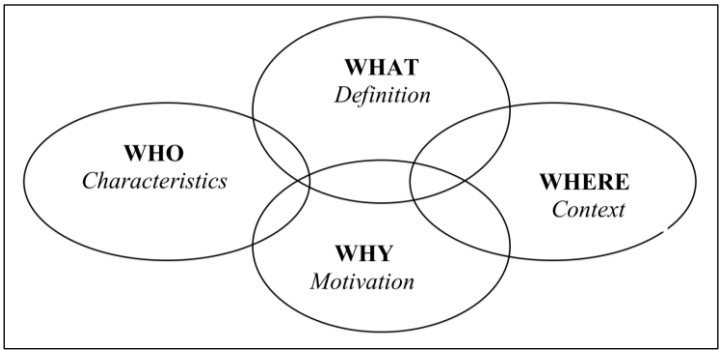


Figure 4: The Four Ws of Volunteering
(Bussel & Forbes 2002, p. 4)

The Four Ws model offers some insight into the potentially complex roots of emergency service volunteering. This is supported by other research from the UK and Australia, which proposes that first responder volunteering motivations are complex, variable, and multifaceted (Francis & Jones, 2012; Harrison-Paul *et al.*, 2006). This being the case, it is unlikely that a one-size-fits all approach to volunteer emergency service leadership learning will be successful.

The use of Individual Development Plans (IDPs) to aid leadership learning elsewhere is well-established (Rubens *et al.*, 2018; Allen & Hartman, 2008). IDPs offer additional value to leadership development because they help steer the learner into real-world stretch activities that embed new skills and capabilities. This has been described as generating a clamp effect in which the learner feels gentle pressure to undertake some level of effort and action towards their personal development. It also increases the willingness of the learner to leave their comfort zone and engage with the learning to affect the necessary growth (Baron and Parent, 2015, p. 46).

Volunteer emergency services must also find leadership learning pathways that work for volunteers and paid staff alike. Australian research into job satisfaction and perceived investment in employee development (PIED) suggests significant differences in how paid and volunteer staff experience their organisations (Rice & Fallon, 2011). Indeed, in the SA Country Fire Service (CFS), many paid staff also serve in additional volunteer roles, creating a further layer of complication and uncertainty around what even constitutes an emergency service volunteer (Handy *et al.*, 2000). As a result, this additional factor will require careful consideration ahead of any leadership development solution.

Literature summary

My Churchill Fellowship research project into exploring options for volunteer firefighter leadership learning perhaps serves as a prequel to three Churchill Fellows who have gone before me:

- 2019: Mr Daniel Busch (Fire & Rescue NSW) undertook a Fellowship towards innovative career pathways for Indigenous peoples in rural fire service agencies (Busch, 2022).
- 2018: Ms Sonja Braidner (Fire & Rescue NSW) undertook a fellowship towards investigating organisational inclusion and fully leverage the diversity employed in fire agencies (Braidner, 2018).
- 2015: Ms Bronnie Mackintosh (Fire & Rescue NSW) undertook a fellowship towards investigating recruitment strategies to increase numbers of female and ethnically diverse firefighters (Mackintosh, 2015).

Each of these Fellowships was targeted towards various aspects of diversity, retention, participation, and inclusion amongst both volunteer and professional fire services. However, the common connecting thread remains the quality of leadership required to deliver on positive change. Yet, leadership of this calibre does not simply materialise. It must be developed, nurtured, and grown with organisational commitment and appropriate resourcing. With adequate investment in meaningful leadership learning for volunteer fire services, successful retention of existing volunteers and recruitment of new volunteers from the wider community will likely be successful.

As we prepare for future bushfires and other disasters, we overlook investment in meaningful leadership development for Australian emergency service volunteers at our own peril. To ignore this critical need would be beyond false economy – it would represent the ultimate leadership failure.

New Zealand

Fire and Emergency New Zealand (FENZ)

Established on the 1st of July 2017, Fire and Emergency New Zealand (FENZ) is an amalgam of the former professional New Zealand Fire Service, the National Rural Fire Authority and 38 rural fire districts and volunteer-based local government fire authorities. The Fire and Emergency New Zealand Act (2017) saw FENZ enshrined as the single agency responsible for firefighting, fire safety, hazardous incident response (HAZMAT), and urban search and rescue (USAR) across New Zealand (FENZ 2021a).

FENZ fast facts

- A blended professional/volunteer fire service
- 1854 paid firefighters
- 11,883 volunteer firefighters
- 993 management & support personnel
- 653 stations
- ~ 85,000 annual incidents attended
- Annual budget: $595 million (NZD)

My FENZ exploratory visit

I initially spent several days at the Silverdale Fire Station, north of Auckland. Silverdale is a composite fire station where paid professional firefighters respond during daylight hours. However, after 6:00 pm, the station is staffed by a volunteer crew, who respond precisely the same way as the paid professional daytime crews. However, in other locations, there are fire stations that are entirely professional, and others that are fully volunteer staffed. In this sense, FENZ straddles the divide between entirely professional and volunteer firefighting using a risk-based matrix approach. Regardless, the expertise in wildfire/bushfire response remains mainly with the volunteer element of the workforce. As a national fire agency, FENZ continues to evolve. The joining of paid professional and volunteer firefighters into a single seamless agency has proven to be a challenge. Five years after the amalgamation, many interviewees indicated that the integration remains ongoing and incomplete.



Figure 5: FENZ, Silverdale Fire Station visit

In July 2018, retired Judge Coral Shaw was commissioned to review and assess FENZ's workplace culture. The resulting report, known as the Shaw report, revealed how severe bullying and harassment was rife within FENZ's organisational culture (Shaw, 2019). An interesting feature of the report was an observation that FENZ… *"consistently rates with the public as having the highest reputation in terms of leadership and success, fairness, social responsibility, and trust. It is recognised by some personnel, including the Chief Executive, that this public image is not always demonstrated internally."*

The Shaw report and its implications remained a consistent discussion theme with FENZ personnel during my visit, and across the 17 staff interviews conducted, there was a broad recognition that change was overdue and that bullying and harassment was out of step with a modern, inclusive community-based emergency service agency, such as FENZ (George & Woolf, 2019). Nevertheless, the pathway towards cultural change remains rocky, and the issue continues to attract senior governmental and media interest (Clark, 2022; Newshub, 2022).

FENZ: Leadership Development Options

While interviewing staff and volunteers in the Auckland area, it became apparent that the delivery of leadership learning across the agency involves a scattergun approach, with FENZ offering a range of non-interconnected leadership learning opportunities. This included the introduction of a four-part Leadership Development Framework (LDF) in late 2021 based on a model adopted by the NZ Defence Force, Leadership Development Centre, focusing on leading self, leading teams, leading systems, and finally, leading the agency. As a foundational document, the LDF defines leadership and leadership development within the FENZ context and builds an agency-wide common understanding around leadership concepts for volunteers and paid staff alike, as shown in Figure 6.

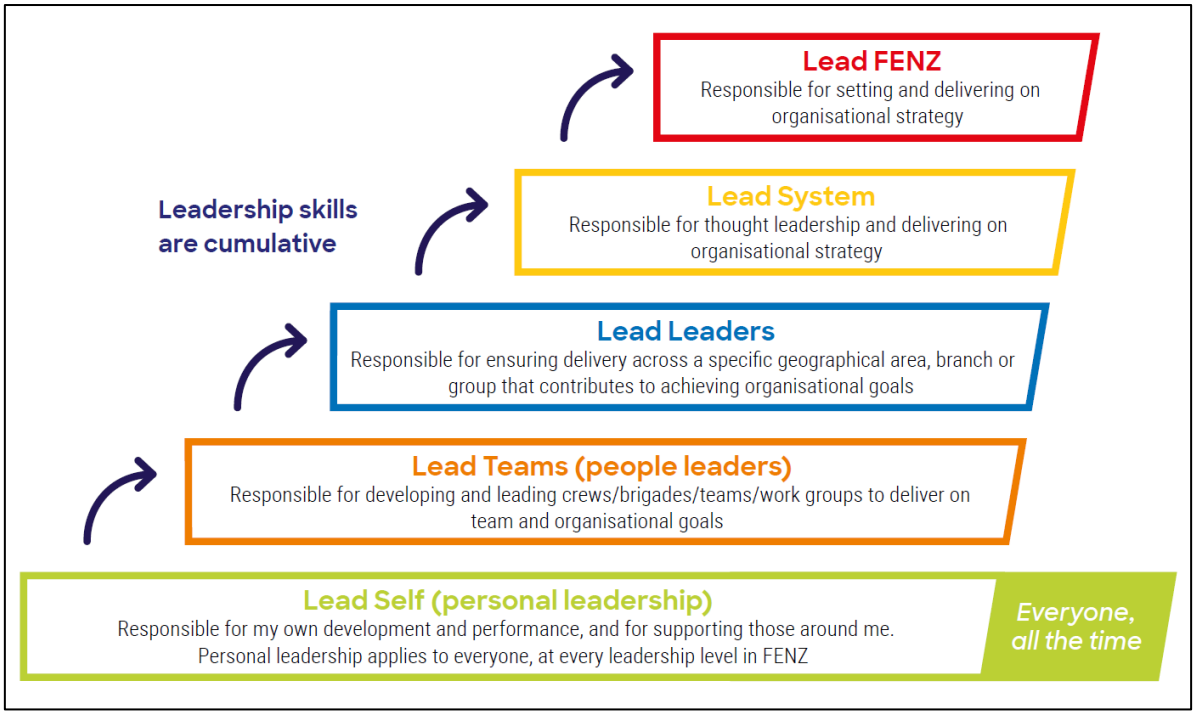


Figure 6: FENZ – LDF (FENZ, 2021b p. 22)

Based on this work, FENZ developed a 10-module Volunteer Leadership Development Program (VLDP) covering to following topics:

1. Lead with a culture of respect & understanding
2. Listen, communicate & lead
3. Lead volunteers through change
4. Lead your team through conflict
5. Coaching leadership style
6. Building Community Relationships
7. Next Generation - cultivating new leaders
8. Positive leading
9. Sharing what works
10. Watching for warning signs

The VLDP program also incorporates a number of personality assessments, including Deeper Signals and the Hogan Reputation Index. To deliver this, FENZ H.Q. in Wellington engaged several paid Volunteer Support Officers (VSOs) whose roles involve managing the VLDP, amongst other things. However, VSOs expressed concern that they were spread thinly, covering many volunteers, and managing other matters such as the VLDP. Additionally, the delivery of the VLDP units in some areas stalled because an arrangement to pay a small honorarium/fee to volunteer firefighter facilitators was not honoured by the agency. Further, establishing the VLDP roll-out at the regional level has been impacted by COVID limitations around face-to-face learning.



Figure 7: Volunteer firefighters as Silverdale Station – 15Aug2022

Effective delivery of the VLDP was also impacted by an ever-growing list of tactical training demands, such as those arising out of the 2019 Tasman wildfires review (FENZ, 2019a, pp. 15-16). Whilst this is a single post-action review example, it demonstrates how fire service training requirements are continually evolving and growing ever more complex. As operational training demands expand, so does the impact on precious volunteer time, leaving little appetite for non-operational offerings, such as leadership skills. FENZ interview respondents stated that operational training always comes first when balancing the rolling out of firehoses versus investment in developing new leaders.

> *"Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat…."*
> **Sun Tzu**, The Art of War

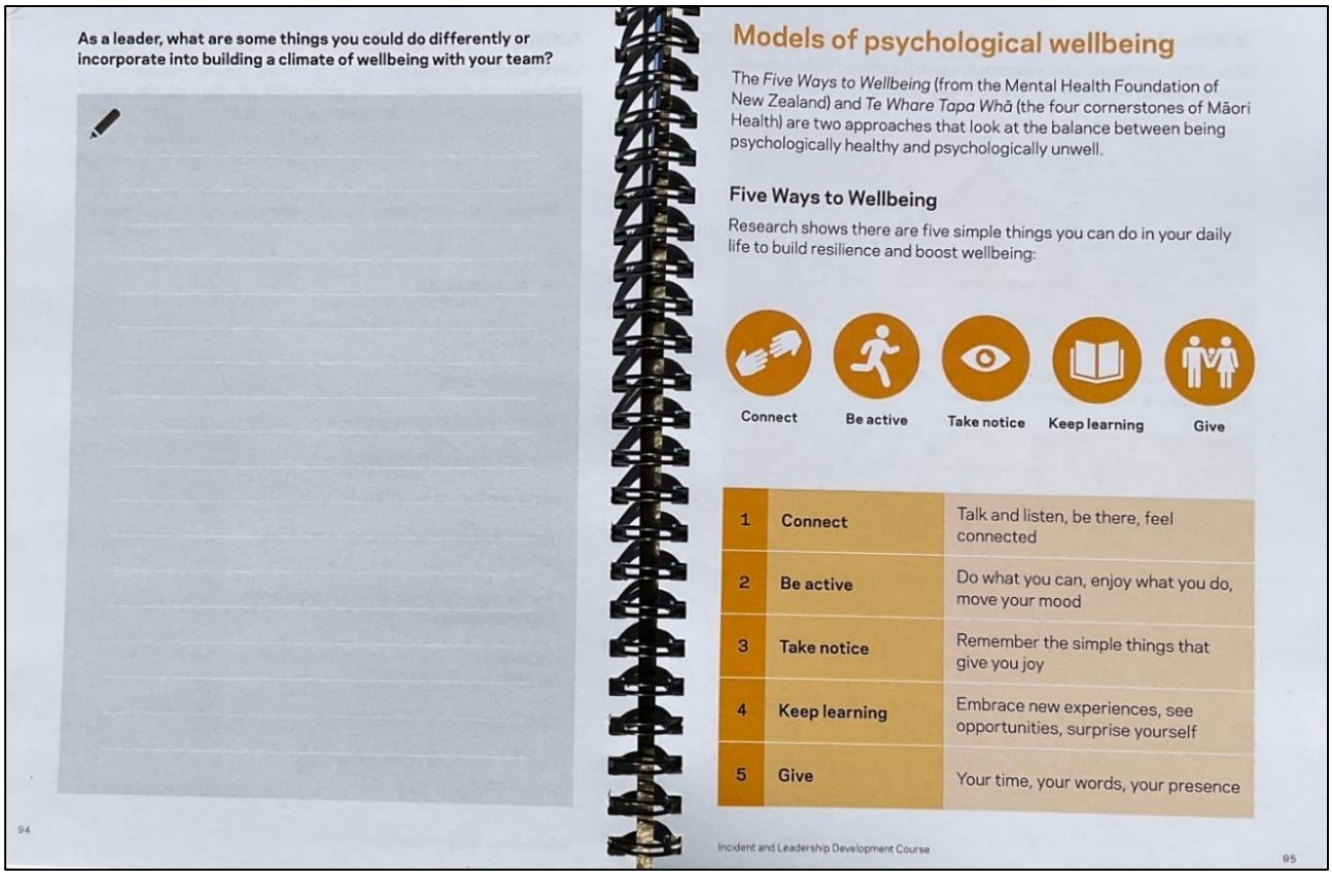
Thus, the tactical/operational imperative continually overwhelms the strategic, and leadership learning lags. However, this situation is not unique to FENZ, and the inclination for fire and emergency service agencies to prioritise tactical/operational training over leadership skills has been recognised as a broader challenge (Jackman & Beruvides, 2021; Hanifen, 2020).

The United Fire Brigades' Association (UFBA), New Zealand's firefighter union, offers a Group Manager Professional Development Program (GMPDP). Designed for paid staff at the Group level, who manages several fire stations was developed in partnership with a local consultant (MindSpring, 2020). FENZ contracts the UFBA to deliver a range for firefighter advocacy and support services, but the GMPDP is the first time the UFBA has ventured into leadership development. The Group Managers are paid staff who co-manage both professional and volunteer firefighters at the same time. The GMPDP emerged, because some FENZ managers had never led paid staff and were uncertain about leadership in a volunteer/unpaid environment.

I also visited the FENZ National Training Centre at Rotorua, which offers a full-time intensive two-week Incident and Leadership Development Course (ILDC) for paid professional firefighters only. This live-in program uniquely blends operations and leadership through a deep-simulation exercise, during which the participants regularly stop the exercise to consider and reflect on their leadership style and behaviours. The entire process is augmented by a complex virtual reality suite which enables the directing staff to produce a high-pressure and evolving operational simulation, pictured in Figure 8. This course is run six times per year and is jointly facilitated by internal FENZ staff along with an externally engaged professional learning facilitator to deliver a uniquely crafted bespoke leadership learning experience. The ILDC features the use of a reflective journal in the form of a course workbook, an extract of which can be seen below in Figure 9.



Figure 8: FENZ ILDC Simulation Suite Rotorua Training Centre



As a leader, what are some things you could do differently or incorporate into building a climate of wellbeing with your team?

94

Models of psychological wellbeing

The *Five Ways to Wellbeing* (from the Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand) and *Te Whare Tapa Whā* (the four cornerstones of Māori Health) are two approaches that look at the balance between being psychologically healthy and psychologically unwell.

Five Ways to Wellbeing

Research shows there are five simple things you can do in your daily life to build resilience and boost wellbeing:

Connect · Be active · Take notice · Keep learning · Give

1	Connect	Talk and listen, be there, feel connected
2	Be active	Do what you can, enjoy what you do, move your mood
3	Take notice	Remember the simple things that give you joy
4	Keep learning	Embrace new experiences, see opportunities, surprise yourself
5	Give	Your time, your words, your presence

Incident and Leadership Development Course

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Figure 9: FENZ ILDC Reflective Workbook, pp. 94 – 95

As the course progresses, participants are challenged by their peers to consider how their communication style and personality projection impact on others and team efficacy. This is achieved using a small group 360-degree feedback approach designed to expand self-awareness, re-emphasise key course messages, and provide a direct link between outcomes and leadership behaviour (Zenger & Folkman, 2020).

This course also features a 3 hour *'wall walk'* during which participants research and present a short topic on Māori culture and traditions. There is also a formal dinner during which course members are required to host a guest of honour and fill specific speaking roles. FENZ has also run a non-operational version of the course, for non-firefighter administrative staff. Unfortunately, this well-regarded, high-quality course is unavailable for volunteer firefighters, as the firefighter's union does not allow paid staff to undertake such courses alongside FENZ volunteer leaders.

Locally, one FENZ volunteer Brigade Leader in the Auckland area has developed a *'values conversation'* workshop designed to help local brigades craft their own values charter. This program intends to provide an organic compass heading for positive brigade behaviour. The concept has helped to reshape the volunteer workplace culture more positively and is now being cascaded to other Auckland brigades. It is, however, yet another example of the scattergun effect mentioned earlier.

FENZ Research Capability

FENZ has also established a unique internal research capability that enables the agency to know and understand its operating environment and people empirically. This is particularly crucial for volunteer-based organisations that rely on complex and varied extrinsic motivators other than payment (Stunkel & Grady, 2010; Gerstein *et al.*, 2004). By way of example, FENZ is currently running a research project titled: Progression and development of women firefighters (career and volunteer). The research objective is to understand women firefighters' views and experiences about the barriers and enablers of career development and progression, volunteer or professional. This will help to understand better how frontline women firefighters can be effectively supported in terms of their career experience or, in the broader sense, to create equal opportunities and an inclusive culture for women firefighters to progress in their careers and in the volunteer roles that they value. This project is being conducted on behalf of FENZ by a well-qualified and highly regarded research and evaluation consultant, Dr Elaine Mossman. The engagement of well-qualified researchers alongside partnerships with respected University research centres demonstrates a high commitment to internal research (see Figure 10).

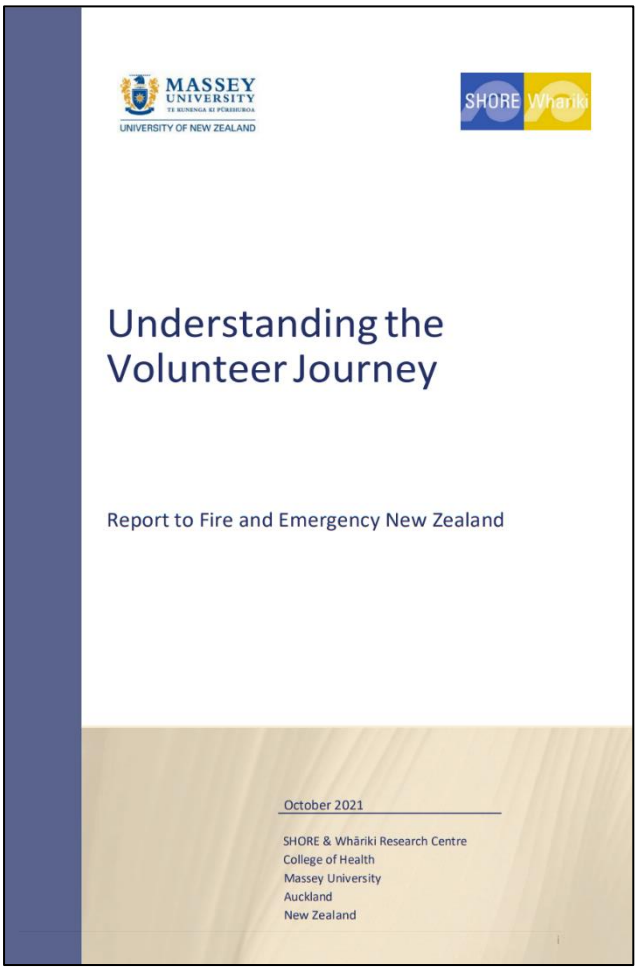


Figure 10: FENZ Research Report Example (Lin *et al.*, 2021)

Moreover, FENZ has ensured that all of its research is made available via an online library containing over 170 research and report papers. This research content is critically geared to assist FENZ in understanding the agency, and its operating environment and building capacity towards positive development and future community resilience (Grant & Langer, 2021). Examples from the online library include publications such as:

- Does FENZ have a challenge advancing firefighters into management roles? (2021)
- Fatigue in firefighting & associated support roles (2020)
- Understanding non-fatal fire-related injuries in New Zealand: 2013-2017 (2019)
- Understanding how firefighters engage with learning technologies (2019)
- Diversity in recruitment evidence review (2019)
- Differentiating strong & struggling volunteer brigades (2017)

Leadership Development Barriers within FENZ

One barrier impacting the delivery of leadership learning for volunteer firefighters was the often-unspoken issue of FENZ volunteer literacy (LITMUS, 2019). VSOs identified that some volunteer firefighters, even at quite senior levels, require literacy support. This was a challenge that needed to be managed with gentle discretion and compassionate care, which was difficult for VSOs who were stretched thinly, supporting many volunteers. Empirical data on volunteer firefighter literacy is scant. However it has been estimated that as many as 40% or more of Australian emergency service volunteers may experience lower literacy confidence to the point where it directly limits their engagement with learning (Hayes *et al*., 2004, pp. 30 – 31).



Kawakawa Fire Chief Wayne Martin has been awarded his Queen's Service Medal by the new Governor-General and fellow Northlander Dame Cindy Kiro. Martin, who started volunteering with the Kawakawa fire brigade in 1992 and has been Chief Fire Officer since 2006, is credited with introducing Tikanga Māori into the everyday work of FENZ, and his methods, engaging with Māori culture to build community connections, have since been adopted by other FENZ teams (de Graaf, 2022).

This challenge is not limited to literacy from just a reading/writing perspective. As learning programs increasingly come to rely on online digital platforms, the issue of volunteer IT literacy within FENZ and other volunteer emergency response agencies is also emerging as a risk (Millar, 2018, p. 67; NZSAR, 2018, p. 37). As agency leadership learning and development experiences evolve, they will involve deeper reflective writing. As a result, a more open and frank conversation about volunteer literacy and its direct impact on leadership and the development of leadership skills will be required (Enesi & Yusuf, 2011; Sligo *et al.*, 2005; Hayes *et al.*, 2005).VSOs also described how the attitudes of FENZ volunteers themselves form barriers to leadership development. Particularly when senior volunteers align their sense of self-worth with their volunteer rank, causing individuals to cling onto a position long-term.

This impacts succession planning and the exposure of new and potentially much younger volunteers to senior roles. As a result, VSOs are exploring creative ways to have meaningful and effective conversations with longer-serving FENZ volunteers to help them to understand their roles in good succession planning. One VSO described an approach where senior volunteers are celebrated through a Māori inspired honour ceremony, where the senior volunteer crosses over into a mentoring role. In Māori culture, such elders are known as *Kaumātua* and are held in very high esteem, fulfilling a range of guiding roles in the wider group, known as the *whanau* or the *iwi* (meaning the group or tribe). A key Kaumātua duty is as the keeper of group wisdom and the storehouse of tribal knowledge. Kaumātua plays a leading role in setting social standards, helping to resolve disputes, and keeping harmony within the group (Oetzel *et al.*, 2019). In this way, the senior fire service volunteer effectively relinquishes their formal rank but at the same time, can evolve to take on a valued mentor/sage position, possibly supporting a younger volunteer.

Camp Kirikau, Fire & Rescue First Response – NZ



Figure 11: With Phil Nesbit

Fire and Rescue First Response (FRFR) is a private consultancy business owned and run by Phil Nesbit, a serving volunteer firefighter, a former career firefighter and former member of the New Zealand Defence Force. As a commercial provider, FRFR conducts multi-day leadership development programs for FENZ as well as other corporate clients at Camp Kirikau, just outside of Taumarunui, on New Zealand's North Island (FRFR, 2022). Registered with the New Zealand Qualifications Authority, FRFR delivers and assesses a range of qualifications, including Civil Defence Emergency Management, Firefighting (structural and wildfire), USAR, Rope Rescue and Workplace Emergency Risk Management (NZQA, 2022).

The FRFR residential leadership course is based around an operational emergency simulation, much like the FENZ Training Centre's ILDC. However, Camp Kirikau offered by FRFR is a real simulation as opposed to using virtual reality. The learners are literally dropped into a simulated disaster, and, acting as a team, they must deploy kit and equipment in the field. The exercise involves the use of trucks, helicopters, and boats to create an authentic field atmosphere. The role of the team leader rotates during the exercise, and themes around followership, communication, motivation, and getting the best out of the team are actively explored. Like the FENZ ILDC, this program employs 360-degree feedback, forcing participants to look deeply at themselves, and their motivations, and reflect deeply on their interpersonal styles.



Figure 12: Camp Kirikau – Unimog training vehicles used during leadership courses

Phil Nesbit was approached to see if the Camp Kirikau program could be modified into a personal growth/leadership development for young people who had disconnected from education and, in some instances, had been in contact with the youth justice system. The result was a Camp Kirikau *'lite'* version course, which has been run several times. This has resulted in a significant positive turn-around for several young people. It has also resulted in some youth participants actively seeking volunteer or career roles with the New Zealand emergency services. This has been a very significant positive outcome.

The core business of FRFR and Camp Kirikau is now shifting to 21 to 30-year-old emergency service volunteers. The cost of their attendance at Camp Kirikau, $1250.00 (NZD), is funded by the NZ Government's Adult and Community Education Emergency Management Fund. This fund enables tertiary education organisations, such as FRFR, to provide emergency management training for nominated adult learners (TEC, 2022). The young FENZ leaders nominated for this program come from all over NZ and only require approval from their immediate manager to access a funded position. Pre-COVID, 24 young FENZ leaders a month attended the program, which has been so successfully received that the next step for FRFR is to identify previous participants to return as facilitators.

In discussion, Phil observed that, in his view, some fire service volunteers in leadership positions are unable to separate their sense of self from their rank, effectively becoming psychologically bonded to their positions. His view, after working with so many young emerging leaders, is that a way must be found to move older volunteers on, allowing the next generation of leaders to develop effectively. This is an issue that has also been identified in the Australian context (ESF, 2021).

Other FENZ concepts & initiatives

As an agency, FENZ has committed to building a more diverse and inclusive fire agency. The 2021 agency demographic snapshot reveals mostly European and male make-up, as shown in Figure 13.

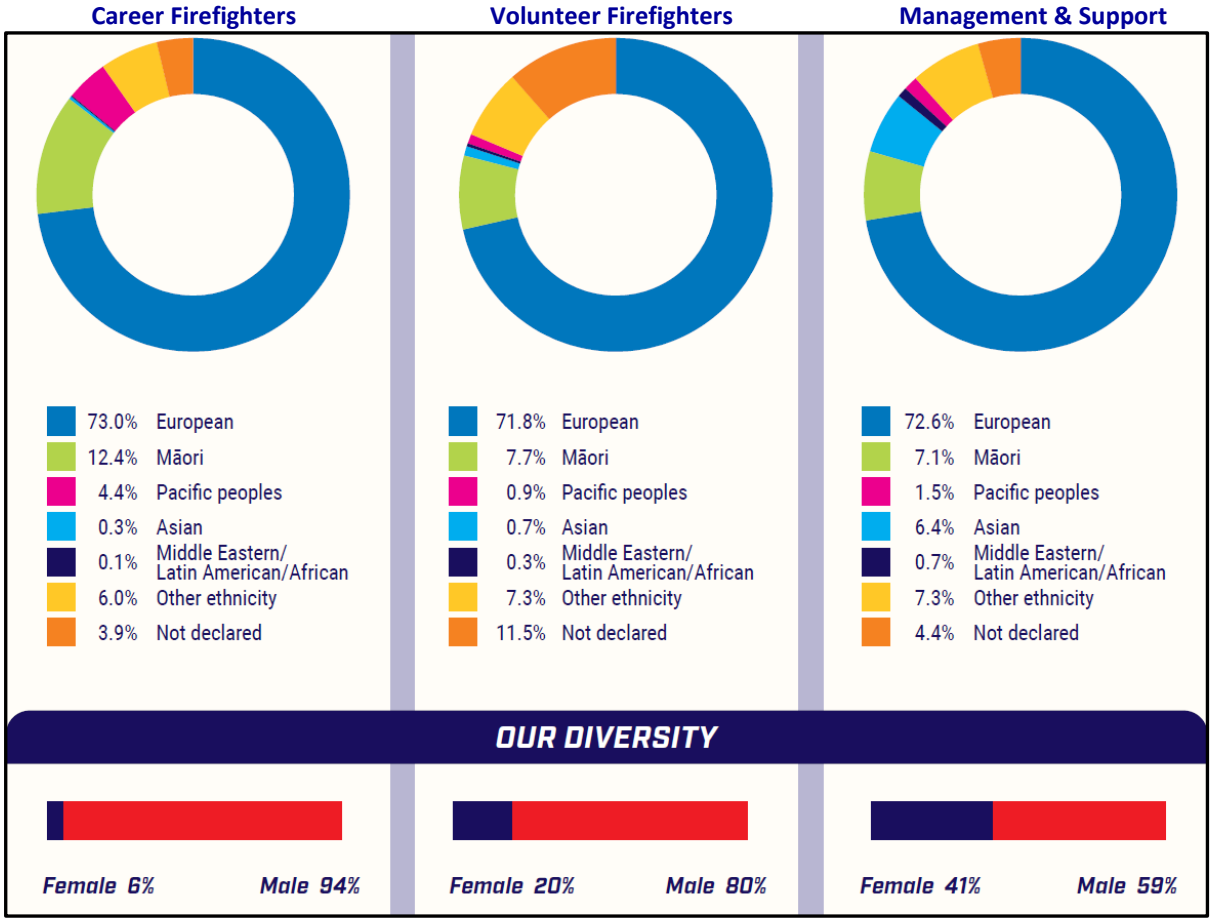


Figure 13: FENZ Diversity Snapshot 2020/21
(FENZ 2021a. p.35)

However, the organisational strategic intent sees FENZ making significant efforts to engage non-traditional fire service volunteers, including women and non-Europeans. As a result, these groups feature in various positive local marketing campaigns.

An example found in the local North Island township of Taumarunui in August 2022 can be seen in the poster shown in Figure 14 below. FENZ is also undertaking proactive work to broaden their volunteer footprint to include opportunities for non-traditional emergency service volunteers such as the disabled in non-operational roles (FENZ, 2019b).

New Zealand: Visit Summary

Towards the end of my New Zealand leg, I visited FENZ H.Q. in Wellington to meet with a number of project teams and other key personnel. The FENZ Volunteer Leadership Team acknowledged that the leadership development program had many disconnected parts. There was also recognition that a leadership learning method involving all strata of the agency towards creating a flow is what's needed for FENZ into the future. A part of this challenge has also been identifying where to start with leadership learning. Should the focus be on entry-level volunteers, those in the middle or those more senior? The FENZ approach has been to start with the mid-level cohort, but at the same time focus on building more effective teams, also, described as *'meeting the culture where it is at'.*



Figure 14: FENZ 2022 Volunteer Recruitment Poster

In 2022, FENZ is continuing its journey of change. Part of this is articulating a set of shared values and creating a clear understanding of *'why we are here'* for all FENZ staff (Figure 15). Whilst leadership development is a significant part of this change, so too is setting a new organisational heading, towards engaging positively with the findings of the Shaw report, challenging though that may be.

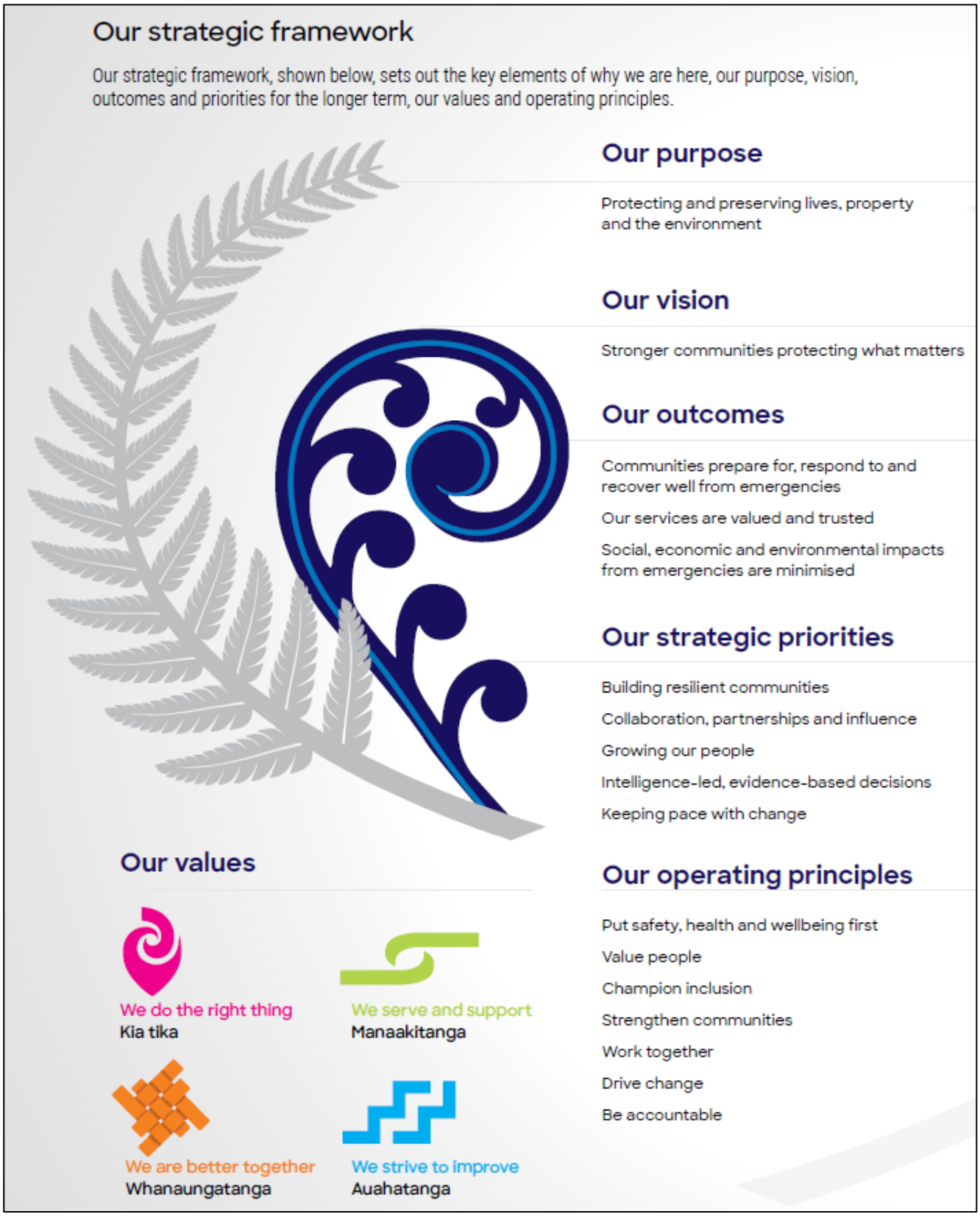


Figure 15: FENZ Vision and Mission Statement (FENZ, 2021c)

United States of America

California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE)

Established in 1885, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, known as CAL FIRE, is the lead wildfire combatant agency for the US state of California. CAL FIRE is responsible for fire prevention and response for over 12.5 million hectares of land under state control. CAL FIRE provides full fire and rescue emergency service by contract to 36 Californian counties and responds to earthquakes, water rescues and HAZMAT incidents (CAL_FIRE, 2022a).

CAL FIRE fast facts

- A professional state level fire service
- 11,293 paid firefighters (5932 permanent / 2693 seasonal / 2688 support)
- 11,883 volunteer firefighters (managed via local unit agreements)
- 980 fire trucks (plus 63 paramedic units)
- 812 stations
- 72 aircraft (including VLATs, C-130s, Ex USN converted S2s and 24 Helitac rotary aircraft)
- 8,835 wildland fires and 535,819 other incidents (2022)
- $3.72 billion (USD) annual budget *(~ $5 billion AUD equivalent)*

Because of CAL FIRE's size and organisational experience, the agency commonly takes the lead in significant emergencies or disasters. Examples include the 1994 Northridge earthquake and the 2003 California Fire Siege. Beyond emergency response, CAL FIRE's mandate includes the Office of the State Fire Marshall, which delivers fire engineering, building code enforcement and public fire safety education. The agency is also responsible for protecting the state's natural resources, including flora, fauna, and waterways. This extends to pest control and management of culturally significant or sensitive sites (CAL_FIRE, 2018).

My CAL FIRE exploratory visit

My experience began at the CAL FIRE Training Center in the township of Ione, which is located about 40 km south-east of Sacramento, California. Openly and upfront, my hosts explained that CAL FIRE was part way through a significant leadership development refocus as a result of a misconduct enquiry that started at their Academy in 2014. As the investigation progressed, the investigators uncovered a range of unrelated behaviours involving dishonesty, misuse of state resources and a range of unacceptable behaviours from exam cheating, bullying, hazing and sexual harassment (Greenhut, 2016; Ortiz, 2015; Wyman, 2007).



Figure 16: At the CAL FIRE Academy, Ione

The current re-focus on leadership development by CAL FIRE has been a direct result of this very public reckoning (McQuillan, 2017). Part of the agency's response has been the establishment of the CAL FIRE Professional Standards Program (CAL_FIRE, 2022b). However, the work of their Professional Standards Program is not limited to the detection and investigation of allegations alone, a point that will be expanded upon on page 33 of this report.

CAL FIRE Leadership Development

As the fallout from the Training Center scandal settled, it became apparent to CAL FIRE that the circumstances had revealed how a lack of a structured leadership development approach formed a significant strategic gap. This story, in many ways, both resonated with and echoed the FENZ experience. In response, CAL FIRE contracted The Ken Blanchard Companies to deliver a leadership learning concept, known as SLII® based on the situational leadership theory. This approach proposes that the leadership task and any associated leader behaviour interact with the functional maturity of those being led to producing a level of leadership effectiveness (Blank *et al*., 1990), as shown in Figure 17. SLII® is based on the premise that any individual's level of development is made up of two factors:



Figure 17: The SLII® leadership model (Cloudflight, 2022)

1. **Competence** – demonstrated skills and knowledge, which can be attained and developed with appropriate support and direction; and

2. **Commitment** – a combination of confidence in the task at hand alongside motivation, i.e., enthusiasm for and interest in the task.

I was very fortunate that Blanchard had sent their CAL FIRE Contract Manager, Jackie Campbell, up from San Diego to Sacramento for my CAL FIRE visit. This afforded me an opportunity to hear directly from both Jackie and Monte Manson, CAL FIRE's Deputy Director of Professional Standards, in person. CAL FIRE's adoption of SLII® as its leadership method and approach stands out because it represents the adoption of a leadership system. Here SLII not only defines what it means to lead (the leader as coach) but also offers a system of leadership communication. Everyone in a leadership role effectively sees themselves as a coach and is equipped with the language to frame any discussion as a potential coaching opportunity. Junior staff also understand the concept and are similarly equipped to hear, perceive, and interpret conversations through a coaching lens, always crafted towards getting the best outcome for both them and the team. From a utility perspective, this approach makes sense because SLII is a human-centred method that is highly practical in nature. Leadership skills and leadership learning are commonly viewed as being 'soft skills', whereas people generally attracted to firefighting are very hands-on, practical-doing sorts of individuals, for whom nebulous concepts and theories mean little (LITMUS, 2019 p. 21; Sommer & Ninja, 2011 p. 445; Straseske, 1996). Perhaps it's for this reason that emergency service leadership learning concepts fail, at least in part, to gain traction (Armstrong, 2004, pp. 19 – 21).

> *"If your fire service does not invest in leadership learning and hasn't had its mea culpa moment, then it soon will. Either that or it's already happened, but you just don't know it yet."*
>
> **Monte Manson, CAL FIRE Deputy Director – Professional Standards**

With almost 12,000 personnel scattered over 800 locations, CAL FIRE faced the very significant challenge of rolling out a leadership concept across all its staff. To achieve this, CAL FIRE invested $5 million (USD) in a 5-year project to deliver the initial SLII learning package (SLP) using Blanchard as an external contactor. By all accounts, this has proven to be an effective (if more costly) way of quickly injecting an established leadership learning concept into a large operational agency.

As the project has evolved, the SLP has been customised for CAL FIRE, using real-world examples. Blanchard has been upskilling the CAL FIRE internal facilitators to enable internal staff to progressively take over the delivery of the materials, with the contractor gradually moving towards a quality control role. However, the interim solution of using blended CAL FIRE and Blanchard facilitation teams has leveraged the complementary expertise and skills of both. This internal/external blended facilitator approach has also been found to be highly effective in various operational learning environments, such as hospitals and other medical settings (Pimentel *et al.*, 2019).



Figure 18: At CAL FIRE, Buena Vista Station

At the time of my visit with CAL FIRE, the project rollout was about half-completed, yet the results have been impressive. During my visit, we took some time to meet with some frontline CAL FIRE staff at the Buena Vista fire station, located just south of Ione (Figure 18). Jordan, a young Station Leader at this location, had completed the first level of the SLP. Jordan explained in detail how attending the program had significantly altered the way he both understood and undertook leadership with his small team. Whilst there, I also had the opportunity to speak with a number of Jordon's team members. All offered a strong positive comment about the way Jordon now communicated with them and how this has flowed into the way they both interpreted their individual roles. The changed leadership language offered by the SLP has positively impacted how the staff members both felt and acted as a team.

I discussed the SLII learning package with Mike, a CAL FIRE Unit Chief who leads a team of about 450 firefighters in the Camino area outside of Sacramento. Mike observed that the SLP had effectively put leadership into a common language for CAL FIRE, which in turn helps to build trust internally. Mike stated that he and those of his leaders who had so far completed the program felt very positive about it. Importantly for Mike, the content has connected with the local frontline leaders in a meaningful way. Most importantly, the SLII method is about enabling voice and shaping leadership into a two-way coaching conversation. Mike noted that whilst there definitely remains a need for Command and Control (C2), what CAL FIRE has been lacking are leaders who understand intent and know when to take positive action. Mike observed that the SLP is shaped around this idea of the '*end state*' and frontline leaders aligning actions with the CAL FIRE strategic mission and intent, a feature the ADF has identified towards what Lt General Peter Leahy described as the *'Strategic Corporal'* (Liddy, 2004).

The SLP package consists of two levels, each requiring 40 hours of face-to-face time for participants. Level 1 involves an introduction to leadership with a focus on self-reflection, identification of leadership styles, role clarity, and communication skills for leaders. The package also incorporates a set of collaboration strategies and implementation tools (CAL_FIRE, 2019a). Level 2 is an additional 40 hours and builds upon the first offering and expands to explore self-evaluation and personal growth as a leader. This next phase also considers applied leadership through group discussions, interactive activities and peer-to-peer sharing and reflection. The intent is to develop critical thinking skills for more senior leaders and engages in pre-course work as well as completion of a Clifton Strengths Index instrument (CAL_FIRE, 2019b).

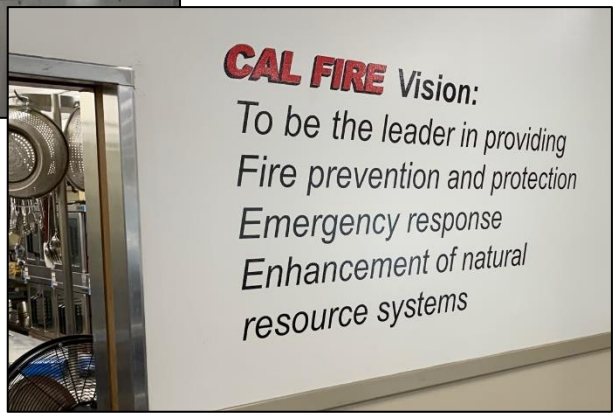
Importantly, the delivery of effective leadership and supervisory skills now features a specific point in the CAL FIRE Strategic Plan, and the undertaking of SLP has also been made compulsory for all CAL FIRE leaders and supervisors (CAL_FIRE, 2019c p. 18).

Placement of Leadership Development in CAL FIRE

In the wake of the Training Center investigation, CAL FIRE's executive leadership team put careful thought as to which part of the organisation should take ownership of the renewed leadership development focus. Traditionally fire service learning and development (L&D) falls to the central training centre, academy, or training team. However, noting that their Training Center personnel were fully committed to operational skills training, CAL FIRE elected to place the leadership and professional development portfolio with the Professional Standards team. The underpinning logic was that because Professional Standards investigated sub-standard behaviour, the area is uniquely placed to understand the sorts of issues arising. This, in turn would aid in the shaping and evolution of the SLP over time. Additionally, it was thought that having Professional Standards sponsor CAL FIRE's leadership learning would provide greater gravitas to the program. This is an interesting proposition, and there is considerable evidence that effective professional standards departments within emergency service and law enforcement agencies play an important role in the maintenance of public trust and confidence (CoP, 2022; Riley & Sarbo, 2004).

Importantly, CAL FIRE's Professional Standards Team do not deliver nor reinforce quality leadership and standards of behaviour in isolation. It was clear during my visit to the CAL FIRE Training Center that common threads were being woven into all programs. The operational training instructors at the Center make significant efforts to ensure that all trainees understand that the way they '*do*' their work is as important as the '*how*'. The Training Center places significant emphasis on CAL FIRE's mission and organisational values during all training courses, and the agency values are widely promulgated (Figures 19 & 20).





Figures 19 & 20: CAL FIRE Vision & Values messaging – Ione Academy Dining Hall

As all CAL FIRE trainers progressively undertake the SLP, they also adopt the Situational Leadership *'leader as coach'* method and mindset with their recruit trainees. What emerges is an apparently efficient and effective partnership between CAL FIRE's Professional Standards team and the agency's operational training arm.

CAL FIRE: Visit Summary

As my visit came to a close, I was taken out to the former McClellan Air Force Base, situated just northeast of Sacramento, from which the CAL FIRE Aviation Team operate some of their sizable fleet of firefighting aircraft, from very large air tankers down to small fire control aircraft and helicopters. Whilst at McClellan, I took the opportunity to sit and talk with some of the staff, who explained to me the importance of leadership and discipline, particularly as it applies to the complexities of firefighting aviation. It was also apparent how situational leadership offers so much as both a leadership approach and method for operational coaching.



Figure 21: At CAL FIRE Air Ops – McClellan AFB, Sacramento

I was also fortunate to be to have had some time to discuss my Churchill Fellowship research journey with CAL FIRE Director, Joe Tyler and his 2IC, Chief Deputy Director Chris Anthony. During this discussion it was clear to me that the entire CAL FIRE Executive Team was committed to and fully invested in the agency's need for integrated leadership development at all levels. What crystallised for me during the conversation was the critical importance of authentic commitment to investing in leadership learning from the very top of any fire service. Investment goes beyond just commitment. The CAL FIRE experience demonstrates that effective leadership learning requires both effort and money. This realisation is not unique to CAL FIRE. In the UK, the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) has been specifically funded by the government to deliver a fire service code of ethics and national leadership framework, including leadership products (HO, 2022).



Figure 22: With Director Joe Tyler (left) and Chief Dep. Director Chris Anthony at CAL FIRE H.Q.

The CAL FIRE experience demonstrates how leadership development can be positioned as a part of building a personal commitment from every member of the agency. It is a story about ensuring that every firefighter is engaging with the values, vision, and agency mission, particularly within a high risk and fluid environment (Benkarim & Imbeau, 2021; Dessler, 1999). Moreover, in hierarchically structured operational organisations, effective leadership development for frontline and mid-level leaders becomes critical. This is particularly so when opportunity knocks and tactical leaders need to apply swift initiative, using agile thinking in line with both the incident controller's intent and the overarching agency mission (Germond, 2022; Johannessen, 2018 pp. 137 – 139). Here, CAL FIRE's people development effort is commendable.

The National Interagency Fire Center, Boise Idaho

My next port of call was the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) in Boise, Idaho. Originally known as the Boise Interagency Fire Center, NIFC was established 1965, and its genesis lay in the perceived need for the US Forest Service, US Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the US National Weather Service to collaborate better. The intent was to avoid duplication and provide a more efficient national fire operations support. Progressively, additional agencies joined the center, which in 1993 was renamed as the NIFC, better reflecting its nationwide wildland fire coordination and cooperation responsibilities. The agencies that today are represented in the NIFC are:

- Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA)
- US Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
- US Department of Defense (DoD)
- US Fire Administration
- US Fish & Wildlife Service
- US Forest Service
- The National Association of State Foresters
- The National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration (aka US Weather Service)
- US National Parks Service (NIFC, 2022)

NIFC fast facts

- A one-stop-shop national wildfire coordination and resource centre
- 650 staff, who managed 64,000 resource requests in 2021
- The US National Interagency Coordination Center (NICC)
- The national emergency radio communications cache
  - ✓ 12,000 + handheld radios [world's largest single stock]
  - ✓ 300 + mobile repeater stations
- 2,200 interagency Remote Automatic Weather Stations
- Bulk field accommodation and rations
- Bulk personal protective equipment and firefighting stores
- Based at Boise airport to facilitate rapid deployment

My NIFC exploratory visit

NIFC is located at the Boise airport complex, so the journey from the terminal to the NIFC complex was comparatively short. On arrival I joined a pre-organised NIFC tour for a number of US Congressional Aides. NIFC is the wildfire logistical support centre for the continental United States. It is also home to the national wildfire management programs of each of 9 agencies both listed above and depicted on the NIFC entry sign shown at Figure 23. A one-stop-shop for all things wildfire support, the NIFC is set up to be able to deploy critical resources anywhere at any time from their fully stocked warehouse, much like a military logistical support battalion.



Figure 23: At NIFC, Boise Idaho

US Federal Wildland Firefighter Leadership Development

Federal wildland firefighter leadership programs are managed by the US National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) involving the same federal agencies that come together in the NIFC. The NWCG sets national training and equipment standards across its member agencies, and offers a comprehensive 7-step leadership development package, which starts from course L-180, *Human Factors in the Wildland Fire Service*, up to L-481 *Advanced Leadership for Command and General Staff*, as shown at Figure 24.



Figure 24: NWCG Leadership Offerings (NWCG, 2022)

Through a dedicated sub-committee, the NWCG manages all aspects of course design and evaluation. Interestingly, the actual delivery of these programs falls to approved providers, which could include the BLM, other federal agencies, or private contractors. The mode of delivery is flexible and in discussion with a number of NIFC staff, it is apparent that the same course can be carved up and the content delivered in any number of ways. Regardless, the NWCG retains responsibility for overall quality control and there are set standards for any individual to become an '*approved instructor*' for any of these leadership learning experiences.

I spoke with staff from a number of the core partner agencies, many of whom had completed one or more of the NWCG endorsed L-series leadership courses. This included staff certified as approved instructors. All spoke very highly of these leadership courses, the intent of which is to promote positive cultural change all underpinned by clearly articulated Wildland Fire Service leadership values:

Duty:
- Be proficient in your job.
- Make sound & timely decisions.
- Ensure tasks are understood.
- Develop your people for the future.

Respect:
- Know your people & look out for their well-being.
- Keep your people informed.
- Build the team.
- Employ your people in accordance with their capabilities.

Integrity:
- Know yourself & seek self-improvement.
- Seek responsibility & accept responsibility for your actions.
- Set the example. (NWCG, 2007)

The NWCG leadership program provides values-based and consistent firefighter leadership development opportunities for a national audience. This is precisely what Australia currently lacks and needs.

***NWCG** provides national leadership to ensure interoperability across federal wildland fire operations through standards, performance support capabilities, & common qualifications, including leadership development.*

One of largest users of the NWCG leadership packages is the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). With about 10,600 staff and approximately 27,000 volunteers, BLM's mission is to sustain the wellbeing and productivity of public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations (BLM, 2022b). The agency's fire program involves fire suppression, vegetation management, response preparedness, and fire prevention through education (BLM, 2022a).

As an agency, and from an organisational culture perspective, the BLM is less about rank and hierarchy, and more about role and skills. This is a very different structure to most fire services (SAMFS, 2021; Coatney, 2018). Yet evidence suggests that less focus on rank, level, and hierarchy can produce greater internal trust, increase productivity, enhance collaboration and make organisations more open to change and adaptation (Giri & Ramakrishnan, 2019; Meier *et al*., 2019). BLM staff I spoke with emphasised that leadership learning is more than an evening or a weekend course. Rather, effective firefighter leadership development should be seen as a whole of career process. The L-180 to L-580 learning programs depicted in Figure 24, provide the BLM a longitudinal learning system. The importance of leadership development for the BLM, and other US federal agencies is reflected in the time allocated to these courses, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: NWCG leadership courses – learner time commitment required (NWCG, 2022)

Course code & title	Pre-course work	Instructor led	**Total course time**
L-180 Human Factors in the Wildland Fire Service	0 hrs	4 hrs	**4 hrs**
L-280 Followership to Leadership	8 hrs	16 hrs	**20 hrs**
L-380 Fireline Leadership	8 hrs	32 hrs	**40 hrs**
L-381 Incident Leadership	8 hrs	32 hrs	**40 hrs**
L-480 Organisational Leadership in the Wildland Fire Service	8 hrs	32 hrs	**40 hrs**
L-481 Advanced Leadership for Command & General Staff	8 hrs	32 hrs	**40 hrs**
		Total time investment:	***184 hrs / 5 weeks***

All NWCG leadership courses are further underpinned by the use of Individual Development Plans (IDPs), which guide learners beyond just the course time identified in Table 3. Whilst the use of IDPs for firefighter leadership development was not found in any other services investigated in this research, their use to aid leadership learning elsewhere is well established (Rubens *et al.*, 2018; Allen & Hartman, 2008). IDPs offer particular additional value to leadership development because they help to steer the learning into real world stretch activities that embed and exercise the new skills and capabilities. This has been described as generating a *clamp effect* in which the learner feels pressure to undertake some level of effort and action to further their personal development. It also increases the willingness of the learner to leave their comfort zone and engage with the learning to affect the necessary growth (Baron and Parent, 2015, p. 46).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the BLM and other federal fire agencies that invest in these programs and subscribe to the values-based leadership model have not reported the same conduct challenges as some other fire services. Here in my Fellowship journey, the notion of a '*dark quad'* of fire service misbehaviours (hazing, bullying, sexual harassment, and sexual assault), potentially linked to a lack of leadership development began to crystalise in my mind.

The BLM Smoke Jumpers – a leadership learning case study

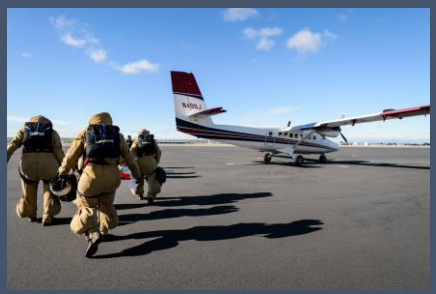
Smoke Jumpers are a specialist sub-group of US wildland firefighters, trained to provide initial response to inaccessible fires. Smoke Jumpers, as their title implies, literally parachute onto the fire ground with rations, drinking water, and firefighting hand tools with the intention of being fully self-sufficient for up to 48 hours (Meriam & Donihue, 2022; Elich, 2022). The BLM Great Basin Smoke Jumpers operate from the NIFC base at Boise Airport. Whilst there I was fortunate to be able to spend some time with them to better understand how they operate as a team.



Figure 25: Smokejumper kit display, NIFC, Boise Idaho

To join the Great Basin Smoke Jumpers, prospective members must have at least 2 years of frontline wildfire fighting experience. Applicants are subjected to a rigorous multi-day selection course, which is challenging enough to lead many applicants to withdraw from the process. For those who do make it through, they will commence their smoke jumper career in Parachute Department, also known as 'The Loft'. This particular team is responsible for making, packing, and managing parachutes and it is a logical place for all new smoke jumpers to start. Once fully competent with all aspects of The Loft, they can diversify into the other teams, namely:

- Crew Supervision (human resources and discipline)
- Air Operations (aircraft and pilots)
- Operations (boots onto the fireground) and
- Learning and Training



The loudspeaker crackles and reverberates through the loft. A steady stream of denim and flannel flows into the ready room as twenty-some Smoke Jumpers take seats on wooden benches. Roll call begins…

Click here to explore a day in the life of the Great Basin Smoke Jumpers

The culture within the Great Basin Smoke Jumpers is based on active learning, meaning every member of the team, regardless of length of service, is continually seeking to grow and self-develop. This is a very non-hierarchical environment, in which there is an expectation within the team that new members will step-up and take the lead as the Incident Controller as soon as they are ready to do so. Here, longer serving and more experienced members have the expectation that they will hand operational leadership to a newer and probably younger member, to develop them. And that new and younger member will have the expectation that those more senior will pass the *'squad boss'* leadership role to them in a supported way. Dress whilst on base is casual, and there are no obvious rank insignia amongst the team. Everyone communicates in a way that priorities safety and exudes respect and a sense of value and dignity for every member (Schlecht, 2022).

There are also implicit expectations around continuous learning and the sense of professionalism. Every Great Basin Smoke Jumper up to the Crew Chief has a mentor, and there is an expectation that everyone will also become a mentor when ready. All Smoke Jumpers maintain a sharp focus on development and maintenance of their technical skills, and this includes leadership. To perform roles as a crew leader, the L-280 Followership to Leadership is a mandatory requirement. To fill higher formal leadership roles, the L-380 Fireline Leadership is similarly required. This, in concert with the use of IDPs, along with an authentic values-based mentoring culture where leadership is shared helps make the Great Basin Smoke Jumpers function as a remarkable team. When considered against the current status of Australian volunteer emergency service environments, the contrast could not be greater.

> *"Sometimes agencies take a bean-counter approach to leadership learning investment which is essentially box ticking and cost saving. Can we do it cheaper, faster, online? Happily, the BLM has never taken this view."*
>
> **Grant Beebe, BLM Assistant Director – Fire & Aviation, NIFC & former Smokejumper**

The New Jersey Forest Fire Service

As my eastward journey across the US continued, I encountered other firefighters who had also leveraged the NWCG L-series leadership programs, including personnel from the New Jersey Forest Fire Service (NJFFS). The NJFFS comprises of about 85 full time professional firefighters and works in close partnership with the US Forest Service. Notwithstanding that this is a state-based agency, the NJFFS fully aligns itself with the national wildfire competencies such as leadership.



Figure 26: In *'The Pines'* with the NJFFS

As a smaller agency, the NJFFS contracts in licenced facilitators to run these courses, with an L-380 Fireline Leadership course costing about $20,000 (USD). I spent a day with the NJFFS Aviation Ops team operating out of Coyle Field, NJ. We discussed the value and efficacy of the NWCG leadership courses that they had undertaken. The consensus was that the L-380 Fireline Leadership course and its exercise scenarios, moved participants out of their comfort zones and challenged them to stretch themselves actively grow their leadership skills. The NJFFS team also identified how these courses also helped them to build a collaborative network and create a common understanding of both leadership and operations with other emergency services, both at the local, state, and national levels. This appeared to be a good example of a smaller fire agency making effective use of a nationally consistent leadership offering to best local effect.



Figure 27: With the NJFFS Team – Coyle Field, NJ

I was also fortunate to spend a few days with the US National Parks Service (NPS) team in the historical township of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Whilst firefighting is not part of the core role of the NPS, it remains a significant secondary function, and in a location such as Gettysburg National Military Park, all Rangers are qualified to respond to wildfires if necessary. Much like the NJFFS, NPS personnel also access the NWCG leadership courses and in conversation with a number of NPS Rangers based at Gettysburg, the positive commentary largely mirrored the comments made by the NJFFS staff, particularly in relation to a sense of shared understanding.



Figure 28: At Gettysburg Military Park, US National Parks Service

The US National Fire Academy, Emmitsburg Maryland

My next stop was the United States National Fire Academy (NFA), located in Emmitsburg, Maryland. Positioned within the US Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The role of the NFA is to prepare fire and emergency personnel to deliver effective response and recovery from all-hazards incidents nationwide. It acts as a national repository for firefighting knowledge and staff development, for professional and volunteer firefighters alike. The NFA was established at its current 44-hectare site in 1979, on what formerly a Catholic college. The NFA offers no-cost specialist training courses and advanced leadership/management programs for mid and senior level fire officers and technical specialists. Courses can be taken on-site (live-in), face-to-face at various cities around the US or online.



Figure 29: With Deputy Director Tonya Hoover & Supt. Eriks Gabliks, US National Fire Academy

NFA Leadership Development

The Leadership and Community Risk Branch is a sub-unit of the NFA established to meet the challenges associated with developing sustainable, prepared, and resilient fire and emergency service organisations. Via this Branch, the NFA offers a series of short courses for both paid professional and volunteer firefighters alike, such as the following 2-day courses:

- Exercising leadership ethically
- Leadership through difficult conversations
- Facilitating adaptive change
- Creating environments for professional growth
- New Fire Chief: contemporary issues (FEMA, 2021)

The NFA, Managing Officer Program is a multi-year curriculum designed to introduce emerging leaders to a set of professional skills around change management, reduction of risk and adaptive leadership. This offering is made up of 5 pre-requisite courses, which can be completed either online or at locally delivered face-to-face sessions, followed by 4 face-to-face courses at the NFA plus the completion of a community-based project (NFA, 2022b).

The flagship leadership offering from the NFA is the Executive Fire Officer Program, which is crafted to prepare senior leaders to meet the evolving needs of communities. With an emphasis on social responsibility, ethics, accountability, and the maintenance of public trust. The overarching units and time commitment required for completion, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: NFA Executive Fire Officer Program Units (NFA, 2022a p. 4)

Course Sub-Units	Content	Mode	**Total unit time**
SELF	Executive Leadership: Self	Residential	**80 hrs**
ORGANISATION	Executive Leadership: Org	Online pre-course	**40 hrs**
		Residential	**48 hrs**
COMMUNITY	Executive Leadership: Community	Online pre-course	**40 hrs**
		Residential	**48 hrs**
CAPSTONE	Applications in the Exercise of Exec Leadership I	Online	**10 week (variable)**
	Applications in the Exercise of Exec Leadership II	32 hrs	**80 hrs**
		Total time investment:	***336 hrs / 9 weeks***

Whilst none of the NFA courses or programs directly result in tertiary qualifications, NFA offerings are regularly reviewed by the American Council on Education (ACE), for university credit transfers. The evaluation process includes recommendation for credit hours and course levels, which is listed on the ACE website, giving potential learners confidence in relation to what academic credits are available to them. The system allows for credit recognition and external certifications which can have positive career impacts, particularly for volunteers (Aboramadan *et al.* 2019; Alvarez, 2016; Wilton & Jackson, 2006). What results is a highly efficient approach that achieves a balance between technical training and education (Figure 30).

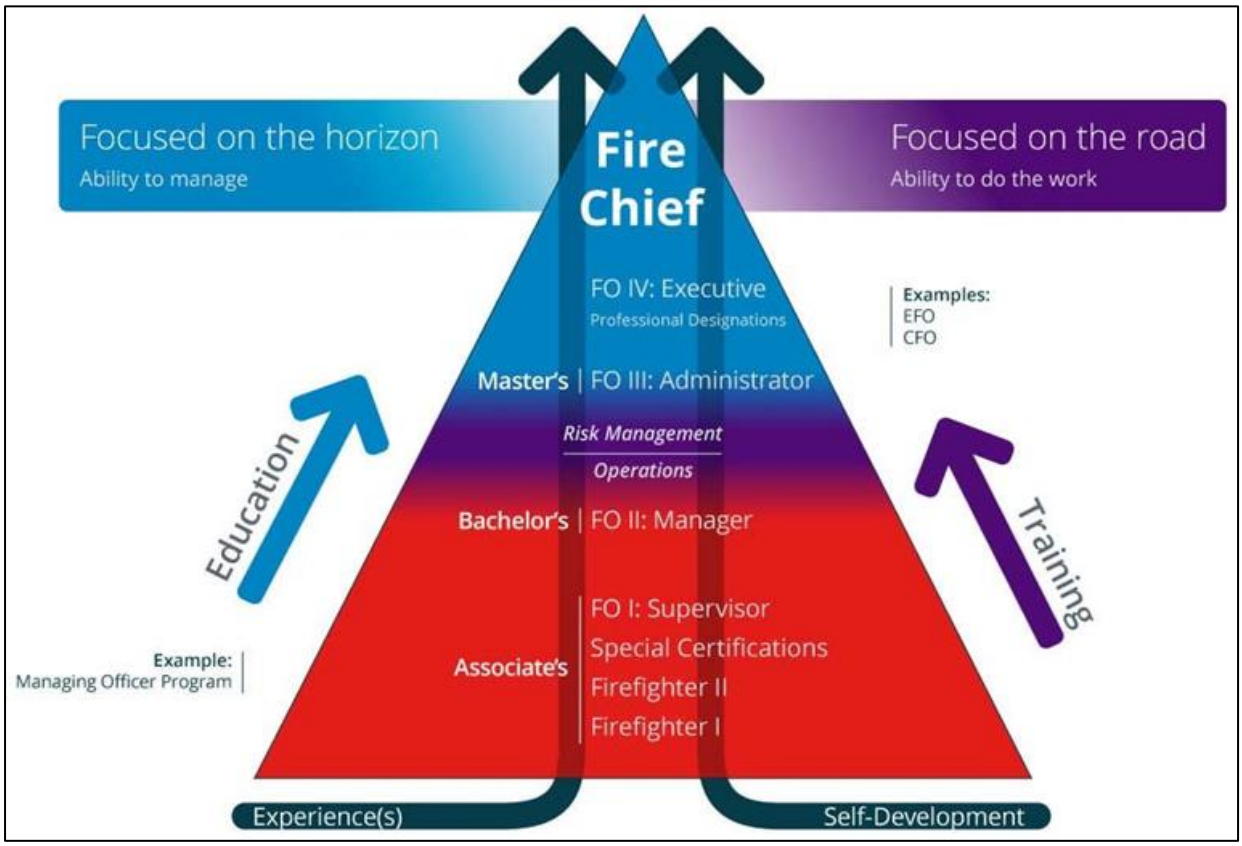


Figure 30: US Fire Administration, National Professional Development Model (FEMA, 2022)

The NFA as a knowledge base

Beyond formal learning opportunities, the NFA also houses the National Emergency Training Centre Library as a resource for fire, emergency management and other related subjects. The library supports the NFA's educational focus as well as the wider need for emergency service-related research efforts. The Library catalogue offers access to academic journal articles via EBSCO's databases, alongside other materials via the library's electronic catalogue. Library staff are available to assist with research, data collection access and advice.



Figure 31: The US National Fire Academy Library

The US Forest Service

My final stop in the United States was with the US Forest Service (USFS) at their Washington D.C. Headquarters. As part of the United States Department of Agriculture, the Service traces its heritage back to 1876, and the agency joined the Agriculture portfolio in 1905, under President Theodore Roosevelt. Fire management and wildfire response on federal land has always been a part of the USFS mission, role, and culture. The USFS is also the home of 'Smokey Bear', which is such an American icon that the name and image are protected under the US Smokey Bear Act, 1952 (NFPA, 2019). With over 10,000 professional firefighters, the US Forest Service is one of the world's largest wildfire response agencies. However, in early 2018 the US Forest Service had its own *'mea culpa'* moment when a whistle-blower went public with sexual harassment allegations involving senior officials (Boudreau, 2018; Joyce, 2018).

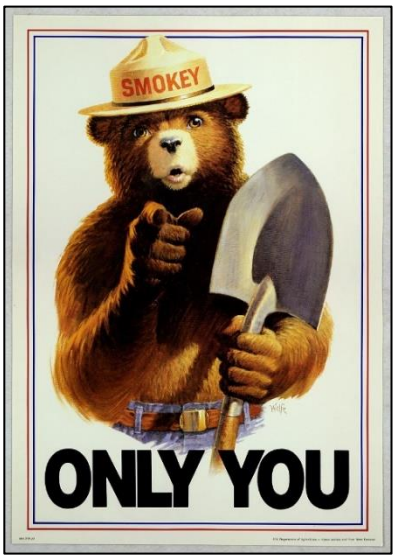


Figure 32: Smokey Bear (NAL, 1989)

The situation worsened when allegations of retaliation against individuals reporting harassment arose, and evidence of a climate of fear amongst some staff emerged (PBS, 2018). As a result of this situation, the USFS took a renewed interest in leadership development. In direct response to the sexual harassment and bullying revelations, the agency initiated a *'listen and learn'* program to help reshape the USFS culture and work environment and encourage a sense of openness to confronting unacceptable behaviour (USFS, 2018). This may prove challenging as bullying behaviour within a fire service context is more complex than it first appears (Koeppel *et al.*, 2022).

USFS Leadership Roundtables

More broadly, however, the USFS leadership development story remains a mixed blend of offerings, somewhat akin to the approach taken by FENZ in New Zealand. Specific NWCG courses are required to undertake incident command roles and the USFS deliver leadership roundtable programs at their Grey Towers National Historic Site in Pennsylvania. One of these programs is titled: *Forest Service Leader: purpose-driven, values-based, relationship-focused*. This 3.5-day leadership learning workshop utilises the RightPath Personality and Clifton Strengths Finder assessments to guide participants towards greater self-awareness. This is followed by five months of group coaching sessions involving senior USFS leaders to connect the learning to the US Forest Service context (USFS, 2022).

USA: Visit Summary

Given size and breadth, the United States leg of my Fellowship research journey unsurprisingly presented a wide range of leadership development options. Whilst the positive impact flowing from leadership development investment was clear, so too were the deep scars resulting from leadership learning neglect and a toxic agency culture. The USA has often been said to be an enigmatic mix of contrasts and extremes, and this has undoubtedly been the case from a fire service leadership development perspective.

Canada

Humber College, Ontario

My visit to Canada commenced at Humber College, Toronto. Founded in 1967, Humber College is one of 24 publicly funded technical colleges in the Ontario Province. The Humber Fire Services Executive Management program is one of several fire and emergency services learning programs sitting within the Faculty of Health Sciences & Wellness. This program is offered in partnership with the Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs (OAFC) and is endorsed by the office of the Ontario Fire Marshall (OFM). This program totals 18 tertiary units, 12 of which are compulsory, with 6 elective units, as shown in Table 5. The course can be taken in any order; each unit takes about 40 hours of learner time, making a total time investment of 720 hrs (18 weeks FTE). The units cost about CAD $400 each, with the entire qualification costing around CAD $7000.

Table 5: Humber Fire Service Executive Management Certificate Units (Humber, 2022)

Compulsory Units (all 12 required)	**Elective Units (6 required)**
Public Safety Leadership	Fire Prevention & Public Education
Public Administration – Fire Services	Emergency Management for Senior Leaders
Fire Service Legislation	Managing Multi-Agency Responses
Effective Communication & Report Writing	Project Management & Procurement
Human Resource Management	Personal Management Skills
Labour Relations – Fire Services	Change Management
Strategic Management in Fire Services	Dispute Resolution Skills
Employee Wellness	Negotiation Skills
Health & Safety	Communication Skills
Career Management	Fire Service Technology
Recruitment, Selection & Talent Management	Introduction to Research Methods
Total time investment:	***720 hrs / 18 weeks***

This program is undertaken by personnel in senior leadership roles, some of whom are volunteers in their home fire departments. Humber College also offers 2-year diploma level courses for those who aspire to a fire service career, along with additional courses for current mid-career firefighters. Humber College engages up to 14 part-time instructors to deliver these programs, most of whom are either currently serving or recently retired firefighters. This joint Humber/OAFC approach effectively outsources leadership development using an established, reputable tertiary learning institution. Members of the Humber Faculty reflected on the need for fire services to develop deeper thinking. In Canada and elsewhere, that is a recognition that leadership roles in fire services require more than technical skill sets, as reflected in the compulsory units in the Humber Fire Service Executive Management Program (Carter, 2007; Burke, 1997). Despite the need for more highly skilled leaders, formal qualifications such as those offered by Humber are not prerequisites for senior roles. Instead, they remain optional only. Nevertheless, recent research suggests that formal education is a vital component of successful fire service leadership (Gauntt, 2022; deForest, 2021).

During these conversations at Humber, the first hints of a need for change and a greater focus on effective leadership within some Canadian fire services became apparent. In 2017 a significant case of long-term sexual harassment and systemic gender discrimination emerged in the Halifax Fire Department, Nova Scotia. In this instance, individuals who acted as a whistle-blower were ostracised and subject to retaliatory behaviour (Munro, 2019; Tattrie, 2017). In 2020, Canadian First Nations firefighters in the Calgary fire department were subjected to racial discrimination, harassment and even physical assaults whilst working in an organisational atmosphere that the Calgary Mayor subsequently described as toxic (Grant, 2021; Bilefsky, 2021). Whilst these circumstances have not yet morphed into a full-blown *'mea culpa'* change moment, the Calgary fire service senior management has committed to listening and learning, much like the US Forest Service.

Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs

I spent one day at the OAFC offices in Ajax, Ontario during my Ontario visit. Here I met with Mark Tishman, the Executive Director of the OAFC and Phil Dawson, a specialist fire leadership consultant with Humber College and former fire chief. Mark explained how Ontario fire services operate as a patchwork of small departments, including some being volunteer based. Across Ontario, there are about 11,000 full-time firefighters and up to 18,000 volunteer or on-call firefighters. These small fire departments are generally underfunded and function without consistent equipment or governance standards (Lammam *et al.*, 2015).



Figure 33: With Mark Tishman, OAFC Executive Director in Ajax, Ontario

As a result, the challenges around the delivery of effective leadership learning, particularly for volunteer leaders, are significant. However, the OAFC is improving the situation by partnering with Humber College and ensuring that a quality certified leadership program is available for all firefighters who aspire to leadership positions. This partnering to develop the Humber Fire Service Executive Management program involves bi-annual meetings to evolve the curriculum to ensure it meets the needs of the various fire departments the OAFC represents. It also shows how an external learning provider can partner with fire services to ensure a consistent and effective learning program.

East Gwillimbury Fire Department

Across the province of Ontario, there are 444 municipalities, each with some form of local fire service capacity. One of these is the East Gwillimbury Fire Department (EGFD), located about 45 Km north of Toronto, which I had the opportunity to visit. With 16 full-time and about 80 volunteer firefighters, the EGFD offers a window to view contemporary community-based fire services in Ontario. From a leadership perspective, the local Fire Chief, Rob McKenzie, has made significant efforts to modernise EGFD. At the forefront of this is reshaping the EGFD priorities thus:

1. Public Education
2. Fire Code Enforcement &
3. Emergency Response (EG, 2017)

The logic applied to this refocusing effort is that combined public education and prevention are a more cost-effective and efficient way to protect the community. The historical prioritisation of emergency response was viewed as problematic because it aligned with an outmoded male/protector recruitment focus, which limited the involvement of a wider variety of citizens as firefighters. This was an interesting observation, as research from the UK similarly suggested that a level of social, moral, and even sexual prestige that had historically been associated with firefighting created barriers and discouraged progressive leadership thinking (Thurnell-Read & Parker, 2008). Both the EGFD Chief and his senior leadership team are graduates of the Humber Fire Service Executive Management program. Through discussion with them, it is clear that their investment in leadership development is paying significant dividends. EGFD is a fire service that now attracts younger volunteers from a broader demographic. More young women are electing to join, and these younger volunteers described a welcoming environment open to new ideas and promoted broad thinking. All this is underpinned by a leadership focus that continually engages its members to think and ask themselves, '*why are we here*?'.



Figure 34: With members of the East Gwillimbury Fire Dept., Ontario

Historically inducting new firefighters across Canada was a case of fit-in or leave, which aligned with evidence of bullying and exclusionary behaviours discussed earlier in this section. However, the EGFD team has found that a more diverse and inclusive team is significantly more productive and efficient. However, there were still those with an old-school mentality who had difficulty with this, and Rob McKenzie observed that from his experience, the key to positive change lies in achieving a more profound understanding through education. EGFD has initiated a locally developed leadership essentials program via a specialist facilitator to achieve this. Emphasising outside thinking and based on the ladder of inference approach, this program grew team communication, enhanced engagement, and encouraged broad thinking. This program involved deep reflective practice, which one of the learning participants described as positively life-altering.

Chippewas of Rama First Nation Fire Department

Located on the shores of Lake Simcoe, approximately 120 Km north of Toronto, the Chippewas of Rama First Nation community was my next stop. The Rama First Nation Fire Department a small fire service of 33 full-time staff providing 24/7 emergency response for the surrounding area. In conversation with the Rama leadership team, I gained further insight into firefighter leadership development and the challenges of balancing this against achieving the baseline operational certification now required in Ontario. All firefighters use a workbook to achieve competency sign-off, which now involves 5000 hrs for paid professional staff and 4000 hrs for volunteers, completed similarly to an apprenticeship.

Driven by the firefighter's union, this approach eliminated volunteer cohorts, and many considered the move to this system to be little more than a tactic designed to achieve a professional-only service. Regardless of the drivers, because the workbook is operationally positioned, there is neither time nor space dedicated to any form of progressive leadership development, resulting in a learning approach focused entirely on technical skills as opposed to the more nuanced people-based factors. What was described was similar to the difficulties FENZ has experienced finding space for leadership development in the face of ever-increasing operational training demands. To overcome this situation, the Rama Fire leadership team deliver leadership development through mentoring for their newly appointed on-call/retained firefighters. In this way, the Rama Fire Department recruits from the local community, focusing on helping them to succeed. This has had the added benefit of also growing the leadership skills of those who act as mentors.



Figure 35: With Chief Jeremy Parkin, Chippewas of Rama First Nation Fire Dept.

A number of the Rama Fire leadership team are undertaking or have completed the Humber Fire Service Executive Management program. Rama team members observed that the program was useful because it was, flexible, modular, and promoted usable skills. Another positive aspect arising was the opportunity to network with and learn from fire service leaders in other departments. However, whilst the Humber program was universally praised, a lack of operational connection was identified as a potential limitation. As a result, the Rama Fire Executive Team felt that relying on the Humber program in isolation may not fully prepare fire service leaders for the leadership challenges faced within a fire service context.

Canada: Visit Summary

Across Ontario, fire services are awakening to the importance of leadership development for their personnel. Leveraging a certified executive development program that is delivered by a professional learning institution such as Humber College offers distinct advantages. Yet challenges remain, particulalry bridging the gap between paid/professional firefighters versus an ever decreasing volunteer cohort. Much like the New Zealand experience, my Canadian contacts lamented the way that the professional firefighter union appear to inhibit leadership development for volunteers. This was an interesting observation potentially deserving of further research as a topic in and of itself.

Denmark

The Copenhagen Institute for Futures Studies

My arrival in Copenhagen heralded a number of rest days intended to allow for reflection on my journey thus far. However, I did take the opportunity to meet with Mr. Lasse Jonasson, the Director of the Copenhagen Institute for Futures Studies (CIFS). The CIFS is a futures think-tank which conducts targeted research to support organisational decision-making guided by strategic foresight. CFIS is quite unique, and Australia has no equivalent. Through the use of mega-trend analysis, the CIFS assists leaders to position their thinking around the emerging environment through anticipatory leadership. Lasse explained to me that the intent behind anticipatory leadership is to enable organisations to position themselves for strategic success despite facing increasingly uncertain environments.

From a volunteer fire service perspective, focusing strategic thinking towards leadership development offers significant potential benefits. This is particularly when we consider the evolving face of volunteer emergency services and the impacts of substandard leadership on sustainability both in Australia and elsewhere (Colibaba *et al.*, 2021; Lantz & Runefors, 2021; Kragt & Holtrop, 2019). Moreover, in the wake of the 2019-20 bushfire season Australian researchers have proposed that volunteer fire services need to morph from the traditional bushfire emergency response function, into an ecologically focused fire-management role. This, it is proposed, would see local fire service volunteers working with local residents and indigenous specialists to develop adaptive strategies aimed at building community resilience in the face of ever worsening bushfires (Norman *et al.*, 2021).

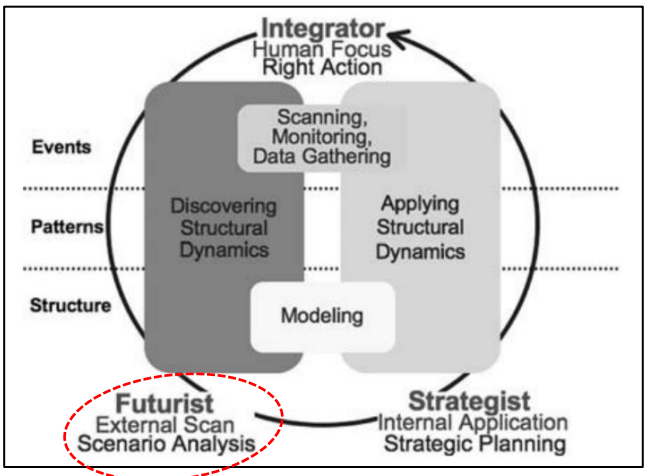


Figure 36: Anticipatory Leadership (adapted from Savage & Sales, 2008, p. 34)

I discussed with Lasse that the challenge for Australian emergency service leaders will be how to be ahead of the game and bring the volunteer workforce along with them at the same time. Here, the visionary futurist thinking proposed by CIFS balances against human action focus and traditional strategic planning, versus the evolving environment and an envisioning of future scenarios (Figure 36). This offers a glimpse of the dynamic, future focused leadership that will be required by Australian emergency service leaders as we adapt to the changing climate and evolving fire risk (DFES, 2019 pp. 30 – 31).

Moreover, Australian volunteer fire services are increasingly being asked to perform emergency related tasks that are beyond their normal remit and training (Jones, 2022). The national COVID response and 2022 floods serve as good examples. Both situations called for flexible and highly adaptive leadership skills, which would be enhanced by investing in the development of anticipatory leadership skills, along with an appreciation of the value of strategic foresight (McDermott, 2022).

Danish Emergency Management Agency (DEMA)

Established in 1992 out of the former WW2 era Danish Civil Defence Corps, the Danish Emergency Management Agency (DEMA) is the Danish national emergency management agency. Operating out of six regional Emergency Management Centres, DEMA functions to support Danish Fire & Rescue's 6550 professional firefighters across 24 local municipal services, including approximately 1130 volunteer firefighters in the South Jutland region. In relation to fire operations, DEMA deploys in support if and when any emergency situation is beyond the capacity of local services. Beyond fire, DEMA coordinates national civil defence and emergency response planning (MSA, 2010).

DEMA fast facts

- A fully professional national level fire and emergency support service
- ~600 professional full-time staff
- 500 conscripts every 9 months (aged 18-24 yrs.)
- 400 + volunteers
- Parent organisation – Danish Ministry of Defence
- 6 x Regional operating bases around Denmark
- Heavy specialist equipment and expertise available 24/7

My DEMA exploratory visit

My visit began at the DEMA National Headquarters, at Birkerød, which is located in Copenhagen's northern suburbs. My initial DEMA briefing was with Colonel Allan Kirk-Jensen who is the Chief Instructor the DEMA National Academy. Falling under the Danish Defence Ministry, the agency engages about 500 conscripts per year (in line with the Danish national conscription law). This also means that the DEMA emergency response budget is covered under the national military expense appropriation. This also means that DEMA can deploy 500+ operationally trained fire and emergency service personnel anywhere in the country or elsewhere at short notice. DEMA also deploys emergency response professionals on international disaster assistance missions on behalf of the Danish people under the United Nations – Stand By Partnership Program.



Figure 37: With Col. Allan Kirk-Jensen, DEMA Academy, Copenhagen



Figure 38: Training DEMA Conscripts, Tinglev Denmark

Denmark is one the very few nations that recruits conscripts into its defence forces. Upon turning 18 years of age, Danish males must participate in an armed forces recruitment day, at which they undergo military aptitude tests. Young women are not obligated for conscription; however, they may elect to participate. Those assessed as fit to serve are randomly selected undergo a 6-month placement in either the Danish Army, Navy, or Air Force (Bingley & Lyk-Jensen, 2022). However, DEMA is offered as a fourth and alternate conscription option. Those who elect to join DEMA must do so for a 9-month engagement, but the advantage for them is that they will undertake a full professional firefighter training program. Currently about 25% of DEMA conscripts are females who have opted into the conscription pool.

As a result, ex-DEMA conscripts are much sought after by Danish local fire services, such as the Copenhagen Fire Service, because they are fully qualified and trained to a very high standard. Additionally, and more importantly for Australia, the DEMA concept provides a steady stream of fully trained, fit and young emergency first responders. What results is a mobile emergency response capability that can be deployed anywhere in Denmark or overseas at short notice. This approach provides a meaningful way for the national government to quickly supplement municipal or local first responders. This is precisely the sort of capacity that the 2020 Australian Bushfire Royal Commission identified, alongside concurrent state inquiries that were conducted in Queensland, New South Wales, and South Australia (CoA, 2020b p. 154).

As a part of my visit with DEMA, I was hosted at the Tinglev Regional Headquarters, which is also the home of the DEMA Emergency Services College. Located about 300 Km west of Copenhagen, the Tinglev complex serves as a major training hub for conscripts nationally. It is also one of six regional operational bases strategically located around Denmark. From these regional rescue centres, DEMA can rapidly supply and establish:

- Tents and base camp modules
- Water purification capability
- Firefighting kit and equipment
- HAZMAT modules
- Communications and data support
- Emergency mobile hospital (medical staff supplied by Defence)

These arrangements are very similar to NIFC in Boise Idaho, albeit on a smaller scale. Towards understanding DEMAs capability suite, on the day I visited, conscripts were undertaking a nuclear response exercise. During this exercise the conscripts quickly deployed to pre-set locations to report radiation readings. The various DEMA Regional Rescue Centres around Denmark are fully equipped with specialist heavy rescue equipment and complex training facilities. This includes, for example, a simulated collapsed car park designed enable role-players, to climb into the pancaked structure. The role-players enter via specially constructed access crawl points in order to provide a realistic entrapment simulation. What I witnessed at Tinglev was a nationally led, centrally managed, well-resourced, and coordinated support and training capability that Australia simply does not possess.



Figures 39 & 40: Simulated collapsed car park, DEMA training centre,

DEMA Leadership Development

Leadership education begins with new DEMA conscripts learning to embrace followership. This piqued my interest because the concept of followership was also mentioned in relation to Camp Kirikau in N.Z. and also as a part of the NWCG Leadership Courses delivered under the US Bureau of Land Management leadership suite. DEMA staff are acutely aware that young Danes, circa 2022 expect to be respected, heard, and involved, and that good followership is not passive.

What the DEMA staff at Tinglev described to me was a situation in which the conscripts help to define their leader's actions and identity, bringing their minds and sense of value to whatever their task or mission at the time (McKimm & Vogan, 2019). When these conditions exist, respect is reciprocated, and the environment is considered ripe for the conscript training journey to commence. Traditionally in the Australian volunteer fire service context, followers are considered passive and subordinate. However, research shows that younger potential recruits sense that their engagement with volunteer fire services is one-way. They describe a concern that the volunteer fire services are 'stuck in their ways' and there is a reluctance to provide a space or listen to younger perspectives (MacDonald, 2021, p. 7). Perhaps the DEMA approach offers a new and alternate fire service leadership paradigm towards engagement of new and younger Australian volunteers?

Beyond the initial orientation of new conscripts, the DEMA leadership education journey continues. Upon completion of the 9-month conscription period, conscripts who demonstrated aptitude are invited to re-engage with DEMA as junior Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs). These newly appointed junior NCOs undertake 9 months of additional training which includes intense on-the-job development and mentoring as they help to onboard and train the next group of entry level conscripts. This method ensures that NCOs can effectively relate to the young conscripts. Situational Leadership is used as DEMA's underpinning leadership theory, much in the same way as CAL FIRE.

This is a critical aspect of adult learning that is often overlooked within an emergency service context (Phillips *et al.*, 2017). At the end of this second round of conscription, the agency has had a significant opportunity to assess and monitor these junior NCOs. At this point DEMA will approach those who have performed at the highest level and offer them permanent DEMA Sergeant positions. Those who become DEMA Sergeants can continue their careers as an NCO, which potentially takes them to the Warrant Officer level through a continuing professional development program outlined at Table 6.

Table 6: Danish Emergency Management Agency (DEMA)
NCO Professional Development Program

Insignia	Rank title	Elements	Delivery
	Chief Sergeant & Senior Sergeant	Major incident management	1 – 3 years, bespoke learner driven program
		Specialist skills (ongoing as req.)	
		Leadership development	
	Over Sergeant	Generic operational skills (30%)	5 weeks full time, plus 1-week public service module **(240 hrs)**
		The Sergeant as instructor/coach (30%)	
		Leadership development (40%)	
	Sergeant	Tactical field leadership (50%)	5 months full time **(800 hrs)**
		Leader as a trainer/instructor (40%)	
		Being a leader (10%)	
		Total time investment:	***1040 hrs / 26 weeks***

I met a number of DEMA Senior NCOs during my visit who had served 20+ year careers in the NCO stream, having started out as conscripts. The learning pathway the follow is designed to encourage and develop the highest levels of emergency response, firefighting, and technical rescue mastery. Once NCOs have progressed, there is an opportunity for them to move into the DEMA Officer stream and is only way to become a DEMA Officer. Here, developing leadership from the ground up truly comes to life in a system that engenders deep respect for the operational expertise of senior NCOs, and likewise for the strategic leadership and management skills of the Officer cadre.

DEMA also delivers a team leadership course (TLC) for municipal fire service personnel. This nationally consistent 5-week full-time program is offered to full-time and part-time paid personnel and volunteer firefighters. The intent is to ensure a standard level of leadership education across Denmark. Whilst at Birkerød, I had the opportunity to meet with two municipal firefighter team leaders from North Zealand, Torben and Claus, who had completed the DEMA 5-week TLC at Tinglev. The TLC is preceded by a one-week instructional course intended to position all team leaders as instructors.



Figure 41: With North Zealand fire service team leaders Torben and Claus at Birkerød

This is not unlike the CAL FIRE *'leader as coach'* method. It is vital because, without instructional coaching skills and the requisite capacity to establish rapport and trust, team leaders will slip back into ingrained command and control behaviours (Grant & Hartley, 2013; Knight & Nieuwerburg, 2012).

The TLC that follows the instructional course is delivered in three blocks week 1, followed about a month later by weeks 2 & 3. Then about a month later the final phase of weeks 4 & 5. The course is centred around an operational fire service scenario; however, it involves considerable individual reflection and is designed to guide participants towards shaping their interpersonal communication. What Torben and Claus were describing to me seemed similar to the FENZ ILDC. However, one interesting difference between these programs is how the DEMA instructors use helmet cam footage from taken from the course members during the practical exercises and uses it to review both actions and interpersonal communications.

The next step beyond the TLC is the DEMA Incident Commander course. This full time 7-week program is offered in the same way as the TLC, including full-time and part-time paid personnel and volunteer firefighters. Combined with the TLC, this offering brings the total leadership learning investment time to 480 hrs. Both leadership courses are mandatory for DEMA personnel who aspire to higher rank. However, notwithstanding that the TLC is funded by the national government, there is no obligation for the municipal fire services to use this course. DEMA staff also explained to me that time and literacy barriers impacted on the volunteer firefighters who undertake these programs. This was similar to the situation described by FENZ staff.

"Followership is a straightforward concept. It is the ability to take direction well, to get in line behind a program, to be part of a team and to deliver on what is expected of you. It gets a bit of a bad rap! How well the followers follow is probably just as important to enterprise success as how well the leaders lead."

Prof. John S. McCallum (2013), University of Manitoba

Research assisting DEMA decision making

Across the Danish public service, including DEMA, there are annual staff internal surveys undertaken to assess not only leadership capability but also to understand how staff are feeling about their work and working environments. These annual surveys operate on a two-year cycle. In the first year a detailed survey on staff psychological welfare and health is taken and the following years survey is focused on leadership capability. This leadership survey is effectively run as a 360-degree assessment designed to help all public sector leaders understand opportunities for improvement. These anomymised survey results not only assist agencies in making positive changes, but they are also publicly accessible records which generates awareness and creates impetus for change. Whilst not specifically DEMA connected, this example suggests the importance of openness and transparency, with the Danish public reporting the world's highest levels of trust in their public agencies, such as DEMA (OECD, 2022; Torfing & Bentzen, 2022; TI, 2020).

Everywhere I went in DEMA, whilst discussing internal staff research and the importance of any emergency response agency having insight into how their staff were travelling, I specifically raised the dark quad behaviours of bullying, hazing, sexual harassment, and sexual assault. My question was whether these behaviours were considered an issue within DEMA. The universal responses I received were that DEMA was largely a harassment free agency, however the same could not be said of the Army, Navy or Air Force, who had all had their share of scandals (Mohr, 2018). Some DEMA staff ascribed this to the leadership development approach that engages younger conscripts as junior NCOs as described earlier. Other staff commented that as a relatively small agency, DEMA need to ensure that its work environment remained positive.

However, towards the end of my visit, I spend some time with a senior manager not from DEMA, but from one of the local municipal fire services that DEMA supports. It was shared with me that, whilst DEMA was largely considered to be harassment free, the same could not be said of the local fire services. In September 2022 these mixed professional/volunteer municipal fire services were the subject of an internal report indicating that sexual harassment was an issue and as a result a project team has been formed to bring about cultural change. Whilst not quite a '*Mea Culpa'* moment, what was described carried all the elements required to bring such a moment on.

Denmark: Visit Summary

DEMA is a remarkable national agency that offers a clue to what might be needed for Australia in relation to an enhanced emergency and disaster and fire response ready reserve. Leveraging off its position within the Danish Defence Ministery, DEMA provides a fast and practical way for the Danish national government to project resources and proactively support local and regional emergnecy services, without necessarily taking over. Likewise, DEMA offers an integrated way for Denmark to coordinate and delivery specialised international emergency assistance without directly drawing in the Danish Defence Force. Moreover, the significant investment in leadership development for emergency service personnel across Denmark by their national government demonstrates a concrete commitment to effective disaster response and community resilience.



Figure 42: With Deputy Head of Mission, Ms Lene Schumacher, at the Danish Embassy, Canberra

My visit to Denmark was the most straightforward part of my entire Churchill Fellowship journey. This was due to the assistance of the Honorary Danish Consul in South Australia, Mr. Steen Holme-Jensen, who assisted my by making initial contact with DEMA through the Danish Foreign Ministery. I was delighted to have been able to attend the Danish Embassy in Canberra in November, after my research journey, to be able to present the embassy with a CFS trauma bear to the Deputy Head of Mission, Ms. Lene Schumacher, by way of thanks for the assistance provided.

The Philippines

Philippines Bureau of Fire Protection

My visit to the Philippines was an unintended addition to my Churchill Fellowship journey. Returning from Denmark to Australia was only possible via a connecting flight through one of several Asian hub-airports, and because I already had some unrelated links to the Philippines Civil Defence Agency, a short visit to Manila seemed a good idea. My first visit was with the Philippines Bureau of Fire Protection (PBFP) in downtown Manila. The PBFP is the national agency responsible for management of fire and rescue services. It is also responsible for the enforcement of the Fire Code of the Philippines, and the investigation of fire related incidents. In the event of a national emergency or disaster, PBFP will assist the military. In fact, all PBFP personnel are regarded as being members of the military reserves and as such must qualify to use military rifles on an annual basis. This is in addition to maintaining their specialist firefighting skills.



Figure 43: At PBFP H.Q. Manila with Senior Fire Superintendent Alma Gran Asacahin

PBFP fast facts

- A professional national level fire service
- ~33,000 professional full-time staff
- 1,431 Fire Stations across the Philippines
- 3,237 fire appliances and vehicles
- Located in 51 cities and 597 local municipalities
- Annual budget of ₱25.54 billion *(~$2.7 billion AUD)*

Fire & Emergency Leadership Development in the Philippines

The PBFP sits alongside the Philippines National Police and the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology as the three core public safety agencies under the Philippines Department of the Interior and Local Government. These three agencies are in turn served by the Philippine Public Safety College (PPSC), which delivers leadership and other specialist courses and qualifications. The PPSC incorporates the following sub-centres and institutes:

- Philippine National Police Academy
- National Police Training Institute
- National Fire Training Institute
- National Jail and Penology Training Institute, and
- National Forensic Science Training Institute

Within this mix, the National Fire Training Institute offers a series of leadership learning and development programs starting from the 8-week Fire Protection Supervisory Course up to a Master in Crisis and Disaster Risk Reduction Management (by coursework). Whilst every rank has specific courses, the foundational firefighter course does contain a module that focuses on followership and what it means to be a member of the PBFP. Regardless, in the Philippines movement through the various levels of seniority are dependent upon successfully completing the requisite program delivered centrally by the PPSC.

I was privileged to be an invited to the 29th Anniversary Dinner for the PSSC. During the evening I was able to discuss my Churchill Fellowship research journey with a number of senior personnel from the Philippines Department of the Interior and Local Government as well as the other services that utilise the PPSC. What I learned was that some local municipalities also provide local firefighting services. On example of this is the Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority, located about 160 Km northwest of Manila. I spent some time meeting with senior staff from the Subic Bay Fire Department, which is a small semi-independent fire service which is made up of seven separate fire stations. Many of the Subic Bay Fire Department staff have attended the PSSC courses and the consensus was that these were of good quality. Being able to access a nationally funded central college was a significant advantage for a smaller full-time regional fire service such as the Subic Bay Fire Department.



Figures 44 & 45: At the PPSC 29th Anniversary Dinner, Manila

The Philippines also features many smaller local volunteer fire services. Leadership learning and development for volunteer firefighters is quite limited however, with the Association of Philippine Volunteer Fire Brigades Inc. offering a one-day (8-hour) Leadership and Resource Management course via a third-party provider. Via the same provider, a 5-day Human Element, Leadership and Management program is also on offer, however I was unable to identify how many Philippine volunteer firefighters had undertaken either of these two programs. In many ways, this precisely mirrors the situation we see in Australia, with an eclectic mix of leadership opportunities for volunteer firefighters, with no governance nor oversight as to who is doing what, when or why.

The Philippines: Visit Summary

My visit to the Philippines allowed me to see and to consider the concept of a total public safety college with a nation-wide footprint, strongly supported by the national government. To the best of my knowledge, this is the only one of its type in the world. Clearly such a one-stop-shop approach not only brings efficiencies, but it also offers scope for the development of a nationally consistent capacity.

What struck me during my visit to Manila was the apparent gap between the professional and volunteer fire services. That said, Philippine culture has a long and deep-rooted orientation towards volunteer service that arises out of the *'Damayan'* and *'Bayanihan'* traditions (Castillo & dela Cruz, 2022). These two Filipino words literally translate so:

- **Damayan**: a sense of compassion shown to others in a time of need, and
- **Bayanihan**: the giving of assistance without thought of monetary reward.

This was a poignant note on which to end my Churchill Fellowship research journey, and I owe it to the people of Philippines for capturing in words, the spirit of volunteer firefighters everywhere. The next time I am asked why it is that we do what we do – my answer will simply be *'Damayan'* and *'Bayanihan'*.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Australia's lack of any defined or consistent leadership learning pathways for volunteer firefighters and other volunteer emergency service personnel remains a serious and systemic national capability gap. When considered against leadership development investment by overseas fire and emergency services identified during this Churchill Fellowship research, the contrast is nothing short of stark.

Moreover, the risks arising from ineffective leadership has the real potential to cast long and deep shadows over the reputations of Australian volunteer fire and emergency services. As a result of undertaking this research journey to explore learning and development options in leadership for volunteer firefighters 14 recommendations across the following five themes have emerged:

Leadership Learning and Development

1. Leadership development should become a volunteer life cycle learning journey, commencing at the volunteer firefighter recruit stage. Moreover, it should be closely aligned with the agency's values and the enforcement of its standards. The intent is to equally position effective leadership alongside workplace safety in the minds and hearts of all fire and emergency service volunteers.

2. Leadership learning experiences for volunteer firefighters should incorporate the use of Individual Development Plans, personal reflective journals, a structured mentoring program and the establishment of a regionally based leadership round-table concept. The intent is to deliver longitudinally impactful leadership development that repositions attitudes and reshapes personal action towards creating high performing volunteer fire service teams.

3. Volunteer fire and emergency service agencies should invest in developing a cadre of internally credible leadership learning facilitators with the skills required to deliver meaningful leadership educative experiences. The intent is to build internal facilitated adult learning expertise that goes beyond the operational training skillset.

4. Careful consideration be given to the impact of literacy on volunteer leadership development programs. Given that volunteer fire and emergency services do not generally assess literacy at recruitment, some volunteers may find evolved leadership development programs challenging. The intent is to ensure that high performing volunteers with excellent leadership potential are not disadvantaged or dissuaded from participating or progressing.

Leadership Quality

5. Australia should establish a national learning academy to deliver multi-modal leadership development programs for volunteer firefighters and other emergency services personnel. The intent is to build effective, robust, inclusive, and high-performing local Brigades to attract and retain new volunteers.

6. A nationally consistent and accredited volunteer firefighter leadership learning curriculum and learning system be established to ensure volunteer leaders are appropriately skilled and competent to lead teams. The intent is to build a common national leadership development standard in the most efficient way possible, including sharing learning concepts and materials between agencies.

7. A framework to transition long term fire service volunteers from senior leadership positions into esteemed elders and mentors (*Kaumātua*) should be developed. The intent is to make space for and provide support to younger emergent leaders, whilst at the same time safeguarding the storehouse of agency knowledge and collective wisdom. This will enable older volunteers to gracefully relinquish leadership roles yet retain a significant and honourable place from which to positively contribute to the agency.

Research

8. Volunteer fire and emergency service agencies build a robust internal research capacity to measure and assess volunteer sentiment in a timely way. Such capacity should be founded through partnerships with reputable academic institutions and/or researchers with relevant deep subject expertise. The intent is to understand the volunteer workforce and the operating environment too guide good decision-making.

9. Volunteer fire and emergency service agencies develop an anticipatory leadership capability within their senior leadership teams. Such capacity should be aligned towards using empirical research to both project environmental and organisational change. The intent is to ensure that our national emergency response capacity remains fit for purpose and strategically sound.

10. Empirical research undertaken by volunteer fire and emergency service agencies should be publicly accessible. The intent is to create a spirit of openness and transparency towards reinforcing public trust and building social licence for volunteer emergency response agencies.

Governance

11. The previously recommended national learning academy should feature nodes based in each state and territory to act as campuses (real or virtual). The intent being to ensure the relevant state emergency services portfolio leadership team develops a sense of ownership and ensure progress accountability.

12. Agency responsibility for volunteer firefighter leadership development should be placed with professional standards. The intent is to link leadership development with professional behaviour and also to ensure that operational training demands cannot overwhelm or sideline leadership development due to misplaced priority perceptions.

Policy

13. The National Council for fire and emergency services in Australia and New Zealand (AFAC) should commission a strategic white paper on fire and emergency service leadership development. The intent is to kick-start a national conversation about volunteer emergency service leadership quality, particularly in light of the recent Australian *'Mea Culpa'* moments and potential links to historically inadequate investment in frontline emergency services leadership development.

14. Any such Academy established (as per Recommendation 5) should be pursued as a partnership with Fire and Emergency New Zealand (FENZ). Such a trans-Tasman collaboration would then enable delivery of fire and emergency service leadership development for Pacific nations towards building cooperation and strengthening capacity. The intent is to develop a joint capability that efficiently contributes to regional security and disaster mitigation (AP4D, 2022).

Dissemination and Implementation

Notwithstanding publication of this report on the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust website, digital copies of this report will be circulated to:

- The Chief & Deputy Chief Officers of all Australian volunteer fire & emergency services
- Australian state & territory emergency service ministers & shadow ministers
- The Federal Minister for Emergency Management, Senator the Hon. Murray Watt
- The CEO of the Australian National Emergency Management Agency
- The President of the Australasian Institute of Emergency Services
- All state & territory emergency service volunteers' associations
- The Council of Australian Volunteer Fire Associations; and
- Asia-Pacific Development, Diplomacy & Defence Dialogue members (ref: Rec. 14)

By way of implementation, commencing in December 2022, I have been assisting the South Australian Country Fire Service to conceive, design and build a Volunteer Officer Development Program (VODP). This program is intended to prepare volunteers for senior leadership roles. The VOPD will involve the use of mentoring, reflective journals and will also necessitate then development of leadership learning facilitators to meaningfully deliver the VODP. These steps all positively contribute to recommendations 1, 2 and 3. However, collectively, these steps are not enough.

This report has also been submitted as an abstract for the Australian and New Zealand National Council for fire and emergency services (AFAC) conference to be held in Brisbane in August 2023. The AFAC conference is an ideal platform from which to disseminate the finding of this report because AFAC is the national keeper of FES practice across both Australia and New Zealand. Its broad responsibility extends to standards, training, service delivery policy, stakeholder relationships and international coordination (AFAC 2021).

Australia's volunteer firefighting force is declining to such an extent that this erosion is now a major disaster mitigation risk. About half of all new emergency service volunteers leave whichever service they join within the first two years, citing poor leadership and toxic culture as major factors in their decision to walk away from their volunteer service. Despite these facts, Australia stands out for lacking a nationally defined leadership development pathway for our vital fire service volunteers. There has to be a better way for us to approach this situation.

Implantation of the recommendations contained in this Churchill Fellowship report must begin with a realistic and active conversation about the scope and nature of the Australian volunteer emergency service workforce. Successful change will require an orchestrated effort going beyond any single individual, agency, or jurisdiction. The 2022 establishment of the National Emergency Management Agency by the Australian federal government offers a unique opportunity for us to achieve a concerted effort towards volunteer fire and emergency services leadership development. Our national government has virtually no skin in the game as far as fire and disaster operational responses go, particularly in relation to bushfires. However, this Churchill Fellowship report offers a space where real, dynamic, and positive change for volunteer first responders could be achieved.

"Vision is not enough. It must be combined with venture. It is not enough to stare up the steps; we must also step up the stairs."

Vaclav Havel

Closing words

To volunteer fire and emergency first responders everywhere: this Churchill Fellowship report is for you. Being able to put *'wet stuff on red stuff'* is not enough. Unless we have effective leadership coupled with respectful teamwork, we simply cannot do the job properly and our social licence is at serious risk. It is my fervent hope that together, we can create positive and engaging volunteer emergency service team environments for all who choose to join us, regardless of ethnicity, gender, sexuality, or creed. Because on the fireground and dressed in our PPE – we all sweat the same.

Thank you for your service…

Courage

By Haydn McComas

So, what is courage
and where does it start?
Does it come from the head
or is it borne of the heart?

Perhaps from the soul?
I'll never know.
But It's a beacon that shines,
a seed of faith to grow.

What makes one person choose…
not to run, but to fight?
To hold out their hand,
and be that voice in the night...

Whispering *'You'll be OK!'*
we're here for you now,
Hold onto me tight,
just don't look down…"

What passion drives this
that sets them apart?
It's a spirit of service,
that's given with heart.

When all hope seems lost,
and there's only despair,
Look out through the haze,
you'll see them all there…

Through tempest and storms,
through fires and fears,
Raging rivers and gales,
against pain, against tears.

With odds that are long,
not knowing the way,
Pushing on through the dark,
to the end come what may.

Volunteers all,
no pay nor reward,
They weather all hardship,
forever towards...

So, bless them all now,
as they tackle each day.
And Lord, keep 'em safe
as they go into harm's way.

For these are my comrades,
who've taught me so much,
The true gift of giving,
a spirit of love.

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