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Work values and volunteers: an investigation into the work values of New Zealand volunteer firefighters.

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Abstract

Declining populations in smaller rural areas in New Zealand over the past 30 years have resulted in significant reductions in many services and an increased reliance on volunteer labour to provide these services. New Zealand firefighters are predominately volunteers, with approximately 85% belonging to volunteer brigades. The cost of training these volunteers is significant and retention of volunteers is an issue for many brigades. By measuring the importance of work values of firefighters and the level that these values being are met by the firefighting organisations they belong to, this research is endeavouring to investigate person-organisation (P-O) fit via the needs-supplies framework. The Theory of Work Adjustment (TWA) looks at P-O fit and how higher levels of fit result in increased satisfaction with ones' work environment. Satisfaction is theorised to lead to longer tenure. This research measured the work values of 178 volunteer firefighters throughout New Zealand. Results indicated that overall there was good P-O fit between individual and organisational values. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was carried out on individual and organisational value items in an effort to compare these to the six-factor structure of Elizur's (1984) work. This analysis found resulted in a three-factor structure for individual values and a different three-factor structure for organisational values, suggesting that work values among volunteers may be somewhat different from those in the paid workforce, although this issue needs to be explored further. Higher satisfaction was related to the individual work value factors of pride and self-development and the organisational work values factors of work environment, recognition and pride. EFA was also conducted on the mean value differences between individual and organisational values, and revealed five factors. All factors: work environment, self-development, self-esteem, power and pride, were correlated with increased satisfaction while self-development, power and pride were correlated with lower intentions to leave. Future areas of research are suggested to improve understanding in this field and to assist brigades to retain existing firefighters.
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