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# ENGAGEMENT MATTERS

MANAGING HIGH STAKES SITUATIONS



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# THREE STORIES...



## Story 2 : Bushfire Buy Back Scheme

Pine Ridge Road, Kinglake West

15 fatalities

Every house destroyed

***'Close to bush and posing an unacceptably high threat to human safety ...'***

Recommendation 46:

The State develop and implement a retreat and resettlement strategy for existing developments in areas of unacceptably high bushfire risk, including a scheme for non-compulsory acquisition by the State of land in these areas.



# Story 3 : Bushfire Neighbourhood Safer Places



What do these stories have in common?

They. Meant. Well.

## What makes a situation 'high stakes'?

- Responsibilities
- Scale – Damage – Disruption – Loss
- Fatalities
- Failures – legislation, policy, process
- Community Outrage
- Grief –Trauma
- Politics
- Media
- Reputational Risk
- Blame

## Systems theory



Patterns of leadership and of authority in disaster impacted communities are very complex. Their complexity however, is usually misinterpreted as confusion and a panacea of strong [external] leadership is frequently offered as a solution without understanding the nature of the problem.

Dynes and Quarantelli  
1972

## So, how do we work when the stakes are high?

- Bureaucratic or government response occurs alone or in a vacuum
- Information outside of official channels is lacking or inaccurate
- Standard operating procedures will always function and be adequate in disaster situations
- Departures from bureaucratic guidelines may be detrimental
- Pre-disaster social structure is weak and disjointed
- Citizens are inept, passive or non-participants in disaster operations
- Emergency events depart sharply from pre-disaster behaviour
- Society breaks down during disaster
- Disaster is characterised by irrational victim behaviour such as panic or looting
- Ad hoc emergence is counterproductive.



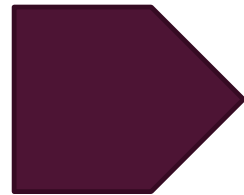
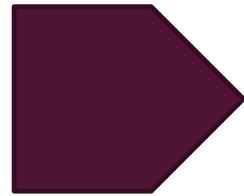
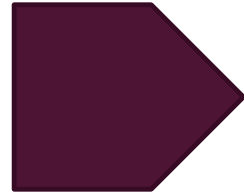
## How *should* we work when the stakes are high?

- Emergencies may create some degree of confusion and disorganisation at the level of routine organisational patterns but to describe that as social chaos is incorrect.
- Emergencies do not reduce the capacities of individuals or social structures to cope. They may present new and unexpected problems to solve.
- Existing social structure is the most effective way to solve those problems. To create an artificial, emergency-specific authority structure is neither possible nor effective.
- Planning efforts should be built around capacity of social units to make rational and informed decisions. These social units need to be seen as resources for problem solving, rather than as the problems themselves.
- An emergency by its very nature is characterised by decentralised and pluralistic decision making, so autonomy of decision making should be valued, rather than the centralisation of authority.
- An open system is required in which a premium is placed on flexibility and initiative among the various social units, and those efforts are coordinated. The goals should be oriented towards problem solving, rather than avoiding chaos.

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**CHAOS**

**Command  
and  
Control**



***Continuity***

***Coordination***

***Cooperation***



One person can make a difference  
and everyone should try.

John F. Kennedy