

The meaning of volunteering: An investigation into the experiences of volunteers in a changing organisation

By

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Summary

The unpaid efforts of volunteers are a unique resource that play a crucial role in sustaining the social and economic well-being of communities throughout the world (Cuskelly et al 2006). In the UK alone, recent estimates suggest that the contribution of the voluntary sector may range somewhere between £18.2bn and £200bn (NVCO 2020; Fanklin et al 2020). Undoubtedly, volunteers form an important part of the voluntary labour force with many organisations being mostly or entirely staffed by volunteers (Einolf 2018). Volunteer retention is tied to the survival of many voluntary organisations and is consequently, a critical management function of the voluntary sector. However, there is a dearth of empirical research which explores the factors that sustain individuals in their volunteer work (Alfes et al 2014). To contribute to this empirical gap, a greater understanding of the meaning of volunteering, in both a conceptual and existential sense, is necessary. To empirically and theoretically develop this body of work, research must address the largely neglected matter of the ‘volunteer experience’ as this will provide insight into volunteers’ perceptions of, and feelings towards, their organisations and their volunteering efforts (Wilson 2012). This thesis takes the necessary step to investigate the experiences of volunteers in one changing voluntary organisation. It focusses on the nature of engagement, as well as what volunteering means to those who do it. At the centre of this research, is the dynamic of organisational change and what affect this has on volunteers, their experiences and the meanings they ascribe to their volunteering efforts. This research draws on 40 semi-structured interviews to deepen understandings of the relationship between organisational change, meaning and identity. In so doing, this research investigates firstly, the various ways that volunteers conceptualise, experience and attribute meaning to their roles and secondly, the effect of organisational change on the volunteer experience.

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A final thought: Throughout the PhD process, one of my sources of inspiration was reading through the acknowledgements of the theses written by people whose work I followed. If you happen to be reading this, whether completing a doctorate or not, let this be a reminder that you too, can do this.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated, with love, to my parents for a lifetime of love, support and good humour.

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Overall Introduction

This thesis examines the experiences of volunteers in one changing voluntary organisation, which is referred to under the pseudonym of ‘Helpline’ throughout. At the centre of this research is the nature of volunteers’ engagement with their ‘work’, as well as what volunteering means, cognitively and existentially, to those who do it. Further, this thesis explores the dynamic of organisational change and its implications for volunteers in terms of a) their involvement and commitment to tasks and service delivery and b) their continued organisational membership.

In their review of volunteering research, Snyder and Omoto (2008: 7) identified two questions of pertinent interest to both researchers and practitioners. They included: “Why do people volunteer? And, what sustains people in their volunteer work?” This second question, as noted by Alfes et al (2014: 2480), “has yet to be fully explored”. The first question, on the other hand, has garnered significant attention among researchers to date. For example, one strand of literature, mostly socio-psychological, has explored the multidimensional motives of volunteers which contain altruistic as well as egoistic elements, and can be measured using Clary et al’s (1998) well-established Volunteer Function Inventory (VFI). Such studies that are concerned with the reasons *why* people volunteer are accompanied by studies reporting on *who* volunteers. Research in this area is mostly sociological and psychological, herein volunteers’ personal dispositions and sociodemographic characteristics (e.g., demographics, personality traits, motives) help delineate the drivers that initiate volunteering (Lindenmeier 2008; Studer and von Schnurbein 2013). While motivational inquiry purports to understand the processes that initiate, direct and sustain individuals’ volunteer action (Clary et al 1998), in reality, it falls short in its explanation and theorisation of how the volunteer experience changes over time and how this, in turn, effects sustained involvement. Put simply, despite the significant attention paid to volunteer motives, investigations have predominantly focussed on volunteers’ initial motivations for joining an organisation at the expense of research that investigates what happens to motivations over the course of volunteer involvement. Consequently, less is known and theorised about the motivations that sustain volunteers’ intentions to continue serving in a specific organisation. This is a clear oversight given that volunteers’ experiences are likely to alter as they continuously evaluate the costs

and benefits associated with their involvement (Moreland and Levine 2001; Livi et al 2018; Kee et al 2018). Specifically, a process of socialisation occurs every time there is a perceived change in volunteers' involvement and/or affiliation to the organisation, thus, throughout their tenure, volunteers will likely experience a constant adjustment to the 'work' environment (Moreland and Levine 1982; Pierro et al 2015; Livi et al 2018). Writing almost three decades ago, Pearce (1993) noted that the factors that contribute toward the maintenance of commitment over time may not be the same as those that initially favour a decision to join a voluntary organisation. More recent work by Romaioli et al (2016:718) maintains similar criticisms; reflected in their observation that "it is erroneous to suppose that if a person has an initial altruistic motivation that facilitates their decision to volunteer, this will remain the same over time and will suffice to justify continuing commitment". Furthermore, the commitment concept within volunteering studies has been explored, quite broadly, in conjunction with satisfaction, engagement (Vecina et al 2013), and motivations (Stride and Higgs 2013). Under these conditions, the investigation and measurement of commitment within volunteering studies has received a somewhat sporadic and inconsistent approach. Thus, greater identification and understanding of the volunteer experience (and what sustains their involvement) requires greater attention (Alfes et al 2014; Valeau et al 2013).

This research aims to investigate what it is like to be a volunteer at Helpline and how organisational change effects the volunteer experience. This introductory chapter provides contextual, background information and a justification for the study. The first and second sections situate the study in its wider social and policy context. The third provides a rationale for the importance of studying volunteers' experiences and the fourth section describes the structure of the thesis.

1.2 Situating the study

As I was making the final adjustments to this thesis, the UK was in the grips of the coronavirus pandemic with all four nations entering into their second or third national lockdown. Undoubtedly, the current conditions will impact the voluntary sector and voluntary organisations in the years ahead; with the inevitable increase in UK Government debt, demand for services set to surge and unemployment rates set to rise. However, the impact of COVID-19 on the voluntary sector and voluntary organisations will likely not be fully realised for years to come and is thus, beyond the scope of this thesis. When referring to

the social, economic and political landscape, this thesis describes the context pre-coronavirus pandemic.

The impact of austerity upon the voluntary sector in the decade from 2010 to 2020 has received a great deal of international attention in extant literature (Hemmings 2017; Dagdeviren et al 2018). In the UK, the combination of recession and austerity policies experienced since 2008 has made the issue of the voluntary sector a prominent and political one. The position of volunteering on the policy agenda has rarely been more salient and as Rochester et al (2010) note: “the weight of expectation about the contribution it [volunteering] can make to individual development, social cohesion and addressing social need has never been greater”. In the context of widespread economic downturn, politicians continue to look to voluntary organisations as effective and efficient ‘alternative providers’ of services to the state (Macmillan 2010). The politically driven pursuit for welfare pluralism, characterised by increased voluntary sector service provision, means that voluntary organisations are delivering services to parts of society that the state and private sectors cannot or will not reach (Fyfe 2005; Broadbridge and Parsons 2003). Important critical perspectives on recent policy have argued that there is an incompatibility between the enhanced role that is envisaged for voluntary organisations and the simultaneous cuts in funding that many of these organisations face (Ellison 2011; Macmillan 2013).

A recent report by the National Council of Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) (2020) outlined the economic and political outlook for the voluntary sector. It presents the UK economy as slowing to its lowest annual growth rate in 2019 since Britain emerged from the ‘Great Recession’ that followed the 2007/8 financial crisis. Despite an overall increase of 4.4% on day-to-day spending on public services, it indicates that overall, spending on public services will remain 3% lower in real terms in 2020–21 than in 2010–11, dropping to 16% below 2010–11 (National Council of Voluntary Organisations [NCVO] 2020). The risk is that these economic conditions will perpetuate the instability and uncertainty that voluntary organisations have faced for decades. As earlier influential work has suggested, when periods of recession are accompanied by public spending austerity, there may be serious ramifications for the health of the voluntary sector (Smith and Lipsky 1993). Commentators and advocates of the voluntary sector have argued that the effect of austerity is exacerbated for voluntary organisations because, as demand for welfare services and support increases, financial support for these organisations (via grants, donations, and public service contracts) tends to be squeezed (Clark et al 2010; Clifford et al 2013). Economic and political turbulence, therefore, is creating a precarious climate for voluntary organisations.

Government decisions to slash spending and devolve services to voluntary sector providers has resulted in demands for greater accountability, legitimacy and efficiency. Significantly, these moves have been couched in terms of the need to ‘professionalise’ the sector (Dart 2004; Ganesh and McAllum 2011; Salamon 2015). Many scholars attribute the professionalisation of the voluntary sector to neoliberal¹ political agendas, which over the last 30 years, have played a significant role in influencing and shaping the role and work of voluntary organisations (Humble 2019). Underpinning the desire for professionalisation is increased productivity of voluntary organisations (Kaboolian 1998). Such pressures, according to Frumpkin and Andre-Clark (2000: 141), result in the development of “a special kind of operational discipline” wherein voluntary organisations are pressured to use market-based criteria for performance measurement. There is growing evidence that in the UK, demands for compliance with funders’ target-driven priorities are often in tension with voluntary organisations’ social goals (Venter et al 2017). Further, critics suggest that the increased reliance on external funding and government contracts, has in turn, eroded distinctive features of the sector: such as flexibility, responsiveness to and emergence from local needs, freedom to critique and self-determination.

While the ‘professionalisation debate’ is now a well-established global phenomenon that has received ever-growing attention from management and organisational studies (Maier et al 2014), very little is known about the complex reality of what this means for the sustained commitment of volunteers. There is a burgeoning literature that has explored the, mostly negative, effects of voluntary sector professionalisation at the meso-level of analysis. For example, organisational effects have included “mission drift” (Macmillan 2010: 7) as well as a diminishing sense of: autonomy, innovation and community action (Milbourne and Cushman 2012). However, the professionalisation debate has largely bypassed the effects and consequences at the micro-level of analysis, that is, the effects on volunteers. As Mikołajczak and Bajak (2020: 2) comment “so far, the problem of the influence of commercialization on voluntary work has been poorly verified empirically”. This is an important issue for volunteering studies since it concerns volunteer commitment and retention. This is where this research most contributes.

¹ The concept of neoliberalism is often used as short hand for the market driven discourse that has emerged, since the 1980s, to dominate global socio-economic and political spheres (Harvey 2005; Peck and Tickell 2002) and to capture, more specifically, the processes through which “social movements professionalize, institutionalize, and bureaucratize in vertically structured, policy-outcome-oriented organizations that focus on generating issue-specific and, to some degree, marketable expert knowledge or services” (Lang 2013: 63–64).

Importantly, the voluntary sector is not a wholly distinct and coherent entity; boundaries around the sector are notoriously blurred, ‘baggy’ and contested with only indeterminate agreement on what constitutes a voluntary organisation (Alcock and Kendall 2011). Moreover, there is considerable diversity *within* the sector, meaning that volunteers consequently support a wide variety of activities, organisations and services (Macmillan 2013). The changing political and economic context described above affects the range of voluntary organisations to different extents and in different ways. The diversity of organisational forms, shapes and sizes in the voluntary sector means that whilst some might be undergoing considerable change in response to a more turbulent and uncertain environment, others might continue to operate as they always have done, largely unaffected. In the following section (1.3) therefore, I introduce the case organisation to give a sense of its purpose and the work undertaken by volunteers. The conclusions drawn in this thesis regarding volunteers’ experiences of change are specific to the context of Helpline. Throughout this thesis, I advocate an approach to volunteering studies that moves away from the current treatment of the voluntary sector as a single, homogenous entity (This argument will be developed throughout the literature review).

1.3 Introducing Helpline

The case organisation in this thesis, referred to under the pseudonym of ‘Helpline’, is a large national charity registered in the UK and Ireland with the mission of protecting and saving lives. Volunteers provide a twenty-four-hour, 365 day a year confidential listening service to anyone that needs someone. Helpline supports ‘callers’² by offering emotional support to people who are experiencing feelings of distress or despair, including those which may lead to suicide. The work of volunteers is varied and involves highly complex topics that are often, emotionally challenging for volunteers. Service users may contact Helpline for ‘everyday, routine’ issues such as failing marriages, loneliness and bereavement. However, a large amount of the work is spent supporting people who are in crisis. Volunteers provide an important service in the event of instances such as sexual assault, interpersonal violence and suicide, to name a few. Additionally, volunteers must learn how to manage other complicated calls such as ‘frequent callers’ (those who call several times a day with the same story) as well as, ‘inappropriate callers’ (including those that are verbally and/or sexually abusive).

² The terms ‘callers’ and ‘service users’ are used synonymously throughout this thesis to reflect interviewees’ conceptualisations of Helpline’s beneficiaries. Both terms refer to the individuals that contact Helpline for support via the telephone, email, face to face and through text messaging.

Volunteers are frequently confronted with intense suffering and often need to continuously switch between a wide range of intrusive and complex topics. Volunteering at Helpline thus requires great cognitive flexibility. As this thesis will reveal, Helpline is conceptualised as a distinctive organisation with unique characteristics. For example, volunteers must operate under strict organisational guidelines including ‘caller choice’ which requires volunteers to respect that callers can make their own decisions. This applies even in the case where a caller decides to take their own life whilst on the phone to the volunteer. This thesis posits that Helpline’s unique organisational characteristics, coupled with its unique service offering, is pertinent to the way that volunteers perceive themselves as members of Helpline. Moreover, organisational changes, particularly to the fundamental values, have widespread consequences for volunteers’ experiences.

This overview of Helpline supports my earlier proposition that voluntary organisations should not be ‘lumped together’ and treated as a group of homogenous entities, as is often the case within the literature. According to Paine (2015: 2) “all too often studies of volunteering decontextualize it. They freeze volunteering in time and space by focusing on individuals’ engagement in one particular voluntary activity or at one point in time”. To overcome the treatment of volunteering as a uniform activity and to fully understand the organisational implications, this thesis adopts a process-oriented approach to the research that firstly, seeks to deepen understandings of how people volunteer, that is, the nature and process of their involvement. Furthermore, this thesis provides insight into the complexity that surrounds volunteer commitment and sheds light on what this means in a voluntary context where ‘workers’ are not bound to the organisation by the usual ties of employment (Kim et al 2009). Moreover, this thesis posits that the lived experiences of volunteers, and the nature of their involvement, changes through the different phases of organisational socialisation and over time. Hence, the centrality of organisational change to volunteers’ experiences. This thesis prioritises volunteer narratives and focusses on how volunteers themselves, conceptualise and experience their volunteering and how they (re)negotiate their volunteer roles and identities during times of change and uncertainty. My research seeks, first and foremost, an interesting, fine-grained, meaningful account of individuals’ organisational experiences of volunteering, empirically drawn from individuals’ accounts.

1.4 Rationale for Research

The rationale for this research is twofold. The first rationale emanates from the historically under-researched nature of the voluntary sector (Hall 1997; Shields 2014) and the particular lack of attention and critical engagement that has been paid to the volunteer experience (Omoto and Snyder 1995; Wilson 2012). The second rationale relates to the significant economic value and contribution of the voluntary sector which is mostly overlooked in current scholarship (NCVO 2020; Fanklin et al 2020).

Supporting the first rationale are O'Toole's (2013: 12) comments regarding the paucity of research on volunteering, she states: "with virtually no interpenetration with organization studies, there exists a relatively small, emergent specialist literature on volunteers, voluntary organizations and not-for-profit associations which covers a multitude of interests". Existing literature on volunteers and volunteering generally falls into one of three categories; antecedents of volunteering (e.g., motivation to volunteer), experiences of volunteering (e.g., what is it like to be a volunteer and how organisational matters influence volunteering) and consequences of volunteering (e.g., personal/organisational/societal consequences) (Omoto and Snyder 1995; Wilson 2012). The first of these research streams has received, by far, the most attention to date. It is to the second stream, the 'experiences of volunteering' which my research most contributes. In attempting to deepen understanding, a first question to consider is why volunteers' experiences have largely remained under-theorised by academia. My own observation is that this empirical gap may be due to the tendency of scholars to base their studies on large-scale surveys with the intent of generalisation which cultivates an overwhelming bias towards quantitative research methods. This is in marked contrast to my own epistemological perspective of interpretivism and ontological preference of constructionism (detailed in chapter four).

The lack of research reporting on the volunteer experience has also been attributed by some to the scarcity of critical engagement on the topic of volunteers and voluntary organisations (see Eliasoph 2013; Fredheim 2017; Overgaard 2019; Southby et al 2019). Even a quick review of volunteering literature reveals the prevalent perception of volunteering as a 'cure-all' remedy for maladies affecting society (Overgaard 2019). Many studies have presented volunteering as a positive and productive activity that is good for volunteers, organisations, and society more generally (Taylor 2005). The various contributions of these studies suggest that volunteers are either: the glue that holds disintegrating societies together (Putnam 2000); a replacement for a welfare state that is unable to meet the needs of diverse populations (McClure et al 2015) or a free alternative for

service provision (Verhoeven and van Bochove 2018). Additionally, the benefits of becoming a volunteer are reported to solve the problem of: lonely and ‘unproductive’ older adults (Onyx and Warburton 2003); ‘disengaged’ young people who need to be transformed into responsible adults (Youniss et al 1997) and finally, widespread poor physical and mental health (for those who engage) (Alspach 2014; Fegan and Cook 2012; Salt et al 2017; Yeung et al 2017). While all of these benefits may be empirically valid, the volunteering literature is largely uncritical. Commenting on this lack of criticality, Eliasoph (2013: 9) asserts “the volunteer is a near-sacred figure that is, in our imaginations, so pure”. The idealised portrayal of the sector is further promulgated by policymakers through an uncritical dominant policy discourse that unquestionably posits the intrinsic value of volunteering and the societal benefits that it produces (O’Donnell et al 2014; Southby et al 2019). The portrayal of volunteering in this way has two important implications. Firstly, it pushes to the background the complexity of these organisations which rely heavily on funding and voluntary labour for their sustained existence. Secondly, the romanticism of the sector’s “inherent purity” (Salamon 1995: 15) raises questions about the state’s interest and motivation in harnessing the sector. Questions about the sincerity of state support has been a popular criticism of those that believe it is simply an attempt to shift the burden of public service reform (Corbett and Walker 2012).

To elaborate on the second rationale of this research, that is, the largely ignored economic value and contribution of the sector, latest figures from the NCVO (2020) suggest that the sector contributed £18.2bn to the economy in 2017/18. To put this amount into context, the contribution of the sector is a little more than the GDP of Cyprus (NCVO 2019). Writing about the closest proxy for the contribution of the sector to the economy (‘gross value added’), Fanklin et al (2020) comment that this figure “understates the true value of the sector. The scale of the undervaluation is uncertain, but we can be confident that it is very significant”. They argue that this chronic undervaluation is attributable to four key factors that are missing from the calculations, they include: the value of official volunteers; the value of informal volunteers; the spill-over fiscal benefits and the wider economic spill-over³. The report goes on to claim that while there is not enough data available to make an accurate estimate of the sector’s contribution, acknowledgement of these factors, could increase the

³ Spill-over benefits refer to the additional benefits that third parties or society receive from the actions of others, for example, helping homeless people into accommodation and work can result in lower crime rates and health spend, as well as higher tax revenues (fiscal spill-over). Receiving counselling at primary school can result in a person living a healthier life and having higher lifetime earnings (wider economic spill-over).

sector's worth to as much as £200bn.

1.5 Structure and scope of thesis

This thesis comprises nine chapters. Chapter two and three comprise the literature review which is segregated by topic. Firstly, in the following chapter, chapter two, the contextual details within which this study is situated are presented. Specifically, chapter two elaborates and enhances this introductory chapter by further examining the changing political and economic environment that governs the voluntary sector. It explores the emerging role of the voluntary sector as a provider of public services and reveals how external pressures are forcing voluntary organisations to adapt to the changing operating environment. It pays particular attention to the interdependent relationship between the voluntary sector and the state. This interdependent relationship is presented by describing the policy discourses and practices that have shaped voluntary sector and government interaction over the past four decades, from Thatcher's neoliberal agenda of New Public Management (NPM) to the Third Way agenda of New Labour, through to the austerity agenda of the Conservatives. The chapter selectively highlights time periods and developments that are pertinent to this study. Particularly important in this research context is the contrast between the growth years of New Labour and the retrenchment of its Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition successor. Ultimately, this chapter synthesises and examines extant literature concerned with the changing role of voluntary organisations in the delivery of public services.

The second review chapter, chapter three, presents and critiques pertinent research as it relates to volunteers' experiences. It highlights the paucity of quality empirical research which reports on situated volunteer experiences and draws on these studies to justify the contribution of this thesis. Moreover, the chapter highlights a series of issues within the literature that contribute to the pervasive conceptual ambiguity in volunteering studies. In doing so, it highlights empirical gaps and begins to carve out the contributions of this thesis. Central to this chapter is the 'meaning of volunteering' from both, a conceptual and existential perspective to uncover the ways that volunteers perceive, conceptualise, and experience their volunteering efforts.

Chapter four reintroduces the case organisation and describes the methodological approach adopted. It highlights the philosophical paradigm underpinning the study and provides a rationale for the use of a qualitative approach. In an attempt to overcome some of the criticisms of qualitative work, this chapter explains how 'quality' is achieved. Finally, the

chapter discusses the ethical issues considered before, during and after the fieldwork as well the processes of data collection and analysis.

Chapters five, six and seven comprise the empirical findings of this research. The empirical task is to discover, explicate, and understand some of the narrative positions. In chapter five, empirical findings are presented under the central theme of 'a distinctive, value-driven organisation'. In chapter six, empirical findings are presented under the central theme of 'authentic emotion work. In chapter seven, empirical findings are presented under the central theme of 'professionalisation as loss'. Each of these three chapters is organised around the three research questions.

Chapter eight provides the analysis of the overall meaning and story told by the various themes. This chapter discusses the findings in relation to the reviewed literature, revealing new insights into volunteers' experiences. Finally, chapter nine concludes the thesis. It revisits the background of the study before outlining the original contributions that it makes to knowledge. Finally, the chapter reviews the strengths and limitations of this research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review (part one)

Voluntary Sector Change, Austerity and Professionalisation

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this first review chapter is twofold. Firstly, it seeks to develop the introductory chapter by providing a more intricate and detailed picture of the political and economic context within which this study is situated. Specifically, it examines the changing political and economic environment that governs the Voluntary Sector (VS) and highlights the ever-changing but increasingly interdependent relationship between the sector and the state. The first half of this chapter (section 2.2) will review the perpetual changes, and subsequent pressures, that the VS faces with each newly elected government. In the second half of this chapter (sections 2.3 and 2.4), an exploration of how these external changes and pressures are forcing Voluntary Organisations (VOs) to adapt to the operating environment will be presented. Specifically, it synthesises and examines extant literature concerned with the ‘professionalisation’ of the sector which has been referred to as the ‘business-like’ phenomenon within volunteering studies. This chapter, therefore, will provide the foundation for the second review chapter, chapter three, which presents and critiques pertinent research as it relates to volunteers’ experiences.

Central to understanding the sector’s changing role is the interdependent relationship it has with the state. Although VOs are perceived to be constitutionally independent of the state, in reality, they exist in a complex web of relations with multiple public bodies which vary in purpose, intensity and impact (Livingstone and Macmillan 2015). Political forces have been described as a key driver of VS change and the past two decades have illustrated just how sensitive the sector is to the economic and political conditions under which it operates (Alcock 2010; Jones et al 2016; Aitken and Harris 2017; Chapman 2017; Kirwan 2017). Changing governments and their respective ideological structures, have both shaped the functioning of VOs and underscored the nuances inherent in the sector-state relationship. Historically, VOs have been embedded within the overall provision of public welfare but the nature of the sector-state relationship has been framed differently at different periods in time. The role and functioning of the VS reflect the shifting power relations that have characterised

provision throughout the post-war period in Britain. The intention herein is not to present an exhaustive history of the ever-changing sector-state relationship but rather, to selectively highlight time periods and developments that are pertinent to this study. Particularly important in this research context is the contrast between the growth years of New Labour and the retrenchment of its Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition successor.

2.2 The emergence of voluntary sector service provision

Central to existing debates about the changing nature of VOs, is the increasing involvement of the VS in public service provision. To understand the sector's current position in its wider societal context, it is necessary to briefly take an historical perspective that acknowledges the establishment of the welfare state under the Labour Government in the 1940s. The welfare state arose from Beveridge's (1942) *Social Insurance and Allied Services* report. The report recommended a government-run benefit system that would improve the lives of the British public and help people from the "cradle-to-grave" (Powell and Hewitt 1998: 5). The introduction of the welfare state has been recognised as marking a critical shift in the institutional landscape of the UK (Carmel and Harlock 2008; Kendall 2009; Milbourne 2013). It was a plan for post-war social reconstruction and led to an expansion of state influence in welfare provision, particularly in the planning and delivery of core welfare services surrounding income and health. In the years that followed, increasing demands for welfare services characterised the national landscape and funding for services subsequently became a key political issue. By the 1970s, the welfare state was in structural and economic crisis (Moran 1988).

The Conservative government under Margaret Thatcher was elected in 1979 on a promise to overcome Britain's problems through radical economic and social reform (Lowe 2005). According to Dorey (2015: 34), the 'New Right' blamed Britain's failures on "a regime of ever-increasing state control, a 'bloated' and inefficient public sector and, underpinning both of these phenomena, an anti-business, anti-enterprise culture which was hostile to competition, profit-making and wealth creation". This, coupled with excessive welfare expenditure led to Thatcher's vision for: a radically reduced welfare state; a reduction in central government expenditure; limited bureaucracy and widespread efficiency savings. Thatcher believed that the welfare state, rather than offering a solution as posited by her Labour predecessors, had become a significant source of social and economic concern (Starke 2006). To overcome these failures, Thatcher sought to reform the public sector

through cuts in budgets, privatisation and marketisation (Foster and Scott 1998).

The underlying logic of this neoliberal strategy was that services would be more efficient, effective and economical (the ‘three Es’ of what has been termed ‘New Public Management’ (NPM)). NPM is based on the premise that private sector-derived accounting and management techniques are superior to cumbersome public administration principles. The roots of NPM lie in ‘public choice theory’ which argues that the intrinsic motivation of those who undertake social interventions cannot be trusted to produce effective and efficient public services because they have a vested interest in supporting the growth of public services. Instead, public sector employees must be extrinsically motivated through the incentives created by market forces, and through the use of performance targets. According to Hood (1995), NPM enshrines seven main features and objectives (See table 2.1).

	Feature	Definition	Justification
1	‘Hands-on’ management of public organisations	Visible managers at the top of the organisation, free to manage by use of discretionary power.	Accountability requires clear assignment of responsibility, not diffusion of power.
2	Specified criteria and standards of performance for evaluation	Goals and targets defined and measured as indicators of success.	Accountability requires clearly stated aims; efficiency requires an emphasis on objectives.
3	Stronger emphasis on ‘output controls’	Resource allocation and rewards that are linked to performance.	Prioritisation of results over procedures.
4	Reorganisation of public sector units	Separate public sector into units of activity, organised by products, with devolved budgets. Units operating independently from one another.	Make units manageable; split provision and production, use contracts or franchises.
5	Emphasising and augmenting the competition in the public sector	Move to contracts and public tendering procedures; introduction of market disciplines in public sector.	Rivalry via competition as the key to lower costs and better standards.
6	Private sector styles of management and management tools	Move away from traditional public service ethic to more flexible pay, hiring, rules, etc	Need to apply ‘proven’ private sector management tools in the public sector.
7	Greater financial discipline and control	Cutting direct costs, raising labour discipline, limiting compliance costs to business.	Need to check resource demands of the public sector and do more with less.

Table 2. 1: Features of NPM adapted from Hood (1996: 271)

By applying the principles and practices of the private sector, public sector organisations began prioritising consumer choice, competition, cost-effectiveness, customer satisfaction and payment-by-results. This ‘marketisation’ of the public sector occurred against a backdrop of increasing private sector involvement in the delivery and management of public services, either in partnership with, or on behalf of, public sector institutions. The rationale behind this ‘contracting-out’ of public services was to harness private firms who could deliver or manage services more efficiently and at a lower cost, and thus provide the taxpayer with more value-for-money. These changes paved the way for Thatcher’s second term of office.

Throughout Thatcher’s second term in office from 1983-1987, her commitment to ‘roll back the state’ and end the ‘dependency culture’ that state welfare supposedly fostered, was ramped up exponentially (Lowe 2005). The Conservative manifesto (1983: 28) rejected the notion that “the state can and should do everything” and thus, a further departure from state welfare ensued. The solution to the retreated and shrunken state was an even greater reliance on ‘contracting out’ to alternative providers and herein, we witness the emergence of the VS assume a central position in the ‘mixed economy of welfare’ (Hills 2011). This was supported by a rapid increase in funding from central government to the VS from £93m when Thatcher first came to power in 1979, to £292m in 1988. While the involvement of VOs in the delivery of public services was not a new development, the nature of service delivery had changed. Greater VS involvement coincided with the emergence of the ‘contract culture’ which replaced traditional government grants (Cunningham 2001). Historically, government grants were given to VOs to help cover general organisational costs on a relatively unspecified basis with some flexibility as to their use; the reporting requirements associated with government grants tended to be minimal. The service contracts that replaced grants were awarded to VOs for specific types and levels of service provision (Moxham 2013; Furneaux and Ryan 2015; Morris et al 2015). Contracts were put out to competitive tender, prescriptive to required outputs, and had strict compliance requirements (Stace and Cumming 2006). The logic behind this increasingly competitive process was that it would drive down prices and drive up added value as organisations all strived to showcase themselves as the most attractive choice for the contract.

These changes in the funding landscape ultimately gave government greater control over the types of activities it was funding; allowing them greater involvement and influence over the VS (Smith et al 1995: 62). Contracts were typically short-term and were characterised by strict and often confining performance criteria, giving public bodies greater regulatory powers over the sector by establishing precise, measurable and binding

performance criteria and output controls in exchange for funding. As was the case with public sector organisations, by the late 1980s, larger VS organisations in particular, began adopting a more ‘business-like’ approach by restructuring their organisations and adopting new management practices while equipping themselves with “all the paraphernalia of the enterprise culture: mission statements, logos, personal identification with tasks” and a “passion (even obsession) for excellence” (Smith et al 1995: 62). However, many voluntary organisations up until this point, particularly smaller ones, had strongly resisted professionalisation, performance management and the management training and consultancy that had become endemic in the private sector and widely promoted for the public sector.

The neoliberal policies of contracting-out public welfare delivery to VS providers have been viewed as contributing to the process of “hollowing out” the state (Rhodes 1994; Jessop 2002). The ‘hollowing out’ thesis centres on the idea that states withdraw from direct service delivery, and transfer the responsibility to a variety of networks, facilitating widespread VS involvement (Jessop 2002). Herein, VOs are expected to alter their behaviours, capacities and identities as a way of enhancing their competitive appeal, thereby emerging as more suited to meet state demands (Jessop 2003; Cunningham 2016). The contracting out approach altered the system of service provision radically and government, in effect, became a contracting agency. In other words, instead of being a provider of welfare services, the state became a purchaser of these services; state provision was systematically replaced by independent providers competing with one another in “quasi-markets”⁴ (Glennerster and Le Grand 1995). This enabled the state to retain its role as funder while transferring its task as provider to a variety of independent suppliers. In a witness seminar convened to discuss the VS in 1980s Britain, Deakin (2011: 499) notes: “the terms of trade with government were extremely one-sided and there were chronic insecurities generated by frequent switches of programmes and policy emphasis”. Critics have argued that the shift in the sector-state relationship was defined by: complex and lengthy bidding processes; service-level agreements; cumbersome monitoring and reporting requirements; legal obligations and stricter accountability mechanisms (Smith and Lipsky 1993; Smith and Gronbjerg 2006; Gazley and Guo 2015; Boris and Steuerle 2017).

The VS’s reconfigured role, as well as its restructured relationship with the state, has, as Cunningham et al (2017: 370) point out, resulted in considerable instability “due to the

⁴ Herein, an “enabling state” uses markets and contracts to focus on its “core” activity, leaving “peripheral” activities to the private or voluntary sector (Davies 2011)

imposition of governance and measurement structures associated with the use of NPM". Moreover, VOs are finding themselves under pressure to change their organisational forms and even goals in response their involvement in public service delivery (Barnes 2006). Although the sector-state relationship was unbalanced, politicians were not alone in their aspiration for an increased role of the VS. By the late 1970s, the sector itself was reviewing its future development, the preference though, was for a sector that involved less, not more, association with the state. Gladstone's report (1979), *Voluntary Action in a Changing World*, called for 'radical welfare pluralism' which would end the relationship with the state and enable the sector to develop autonomy and utilise community-led action. Despite this, the imposition of the so-called 'contract culture' meant that many VOs were trapped in this relationship because they were simultaneously confronted with an increasing need for funding and greater demands for their services. The acceleration of VS growth throughout the 1980s and 1990s has been attributed to the 'social policy revolution' that placed the VS at the heart of a 'mixed economy of welfare' (Crowson 2011).

2.2.1 New Labour: Reconfiguring the sector-state relationship

New Labour's landslide victory in the 1997 election was in part, the result of public dissatisfaction with the previous Conservative administration's approach to public service reform and welfare. Prior to its election, New Labour had been internally restructured and modernised, most notably through the abolition of clause IV in 1995 (Kenny and Smith 2001). Clause IV signified the Labour party's explicit commitment to socialism and thus, its abolition was Tony Blair's attempt at moving the Labour party away from its socialist roots. Under the guise of 'modernisation', New Labour represented a significant shift in the social-democratic position adopted by previous labour administrations whereby it had set its course against Keynesian economics, nationalisation and rational planning in favour of its 'third way' or centrist approach to policies that were set out in its 1996 manifesto, *New Labour, New Life For Britain* (Giddens 1998; Bullock 2009). Underpinning the manifesto was the "over-centralisation of government and lack of accountability" as "a problem in both governments of left and right". New Labour pledged its commitment to "the democratic renewal of our country through decentralisation and the elimination of excessive government secrecy" (Labour Party 1996). The 'third way' was intended to capture a rejection of public service policy planning, which either relied primarily on the state (as supposedly was the case

with old Labour governments) or on the market (as was the case under the Thatcher governments of the 1980s).

Under New Labour, there was still evidence of a drive for efficiency in public services as there had been during the Thatcher years. Davies (2011: 642) notes that New Labour “embraced much of the previous government’s neo-liberal analysis in terms of public service reform with the deployment of many of the standard instruments from the New Public Management (NPM) toolbox”. In particular, the Government’s emphasis on responsiveness to users and public choice was consistent with the logic of NPM, as was the ongoing focus on quantifying and setting performance targets. This was most notable through the ‘Prime Minister’s Delivery Unit’ that was specifically established to manage and enforce performance management, performance indicators and Public Service Agreements (PSAs). One position is that the discourse of the ‘third way’, along with New Labour’s view of the labour market (which embraced choice, competition and efficiency) simply extended the neo-liberal⁵ agenda of the Conservative governments from 1979 to 1997 (Hay 1999; Buckler and Dolowitz 2000; Leys 2001; Crouch 2001; Hall 2003; Jessop 2007; Wood 2010). Commenting on the reforms initiated by Thatcher, Dorey (2015: 35) states: “[the reforms] have been maintained, consolidated and extended by subsequent governments, not least by New Labour, [who] ensured that the legacy of Thatcherism in this major sphere of public policy has endured, and continues today”. Furthermore, Hesmondhalgh et al (2015: 105) comment: “New Labour successfully completed the implementation of neo-liberalising policies that the conservatives had struggled to realise”, and they proceed to claim that the party adopted NPM techniques “with new vigour” due to a lack of trust in public service workers and managers who “were understood as working subjects in need of constant vigilance and monitoring”.

A second view posits that New Labour inherited a welfare landscape not of its own making and that the administration adopted a pragmatic response to accept or modify the conservative reforms that appeared to work and reject those that did not. Despite great continuity between New Labour and its Conservative predecessor, the New Labour

⁵ Neoliberalism is not without its critics and conceptually, its ‘looseness’ is now widely recognised, even by those who use the term. Watkins (2010:7) for example, comments that neoliberalism is “a dismal epithet ... imprecise and over-used”. Hall (2011: 10) similarly writes that “the term lumps together too many things to merit a single identity; it is reductive, sacrificing attention to internal complexities and geohistorical specificity”. Nevertheless, as Watkins (2010: 7) states, “some term is needed to describe the macro-economic paradigm that has dominated from the end of the 1970s until -at least- 2008”.

government differed from its predecessor in three important respects where the VS was concerned: the scale of funding; the method of funding and the range of provision opened up to the sector. While welfare pluralism was what some call an area of “policy convergence”, the market-style, contractual environment was criticised by New Labour for being too ‘instrumental’ in its use of the sector (Taylor 2002; Haugh and Kitson 2007). New Labour acknowledged the sector’s calls for greater autonomy and recognised the threat posed to the sector’s independence under contract. Thus, early on in New Labour’s premiership, a more supportive policy dialogue emerged and the party beckoned to build a more authentic ‘culture of partnership’ as part of its determination to improve the delivery of public services (Lewis 2005; Alcock 2010; Macmillan 2013). The pledge to transform the role of the VS became the leitmotif of New Labour policy (Alcock 2010). Through the ‘third way’, New Labour distanced itself from both the old left and the new right political parties and sought to reconfigure the voluntary sector-state relationship. This relationship would now be guided by the ‘Compact’⁶. The Compact was an agreement between the government and the VS which set out the commitments on both sides to improve their working relationship for the benefit of communities and citizens. The Compact was developed from recommendations by the Deakin Commission (1996) which undertook an independent inquiry that reviewed the potential challenges facing the sector at the turn of the century. The Compact provided a framework for the expectations and roles of each; positioning the voluntary sector within public policy and ultimately creating horizontal support (Kendall 2000). On the side of the government, it was agreed that better attention would be paid to funding, consultation and working relations. For the VS, the emphasis was placed on: the continuation of high standards in funding and accountability; open communication between members, service users and supporters and the overall promotion of good practice (Lewis 2005). The growth of the voluntary sector under New Labour was aided by the willingness of voluntary organisations to take part in capacity building, collaboration and mergers which enabled them to deliver large-scale service delivery contracts (Milbourne and Cushman 2015). Critics though, have pointed out that there was nothing ‘new’ or distinctive about promoting, and relying on, a mix of state and market forces as a means of ensuring effective service delivery (Driver and Martell 1998; Rubenstein 2000; Bullock 2009; Daniels and McIlroy 2009).

⁶ The idea of a Compact was identified by Tony Giddens, an influential advisor to the Labour government and then Director of the London School of Economics. The compact was the key distinguishing feature in the development of ‘third way’ thinking about the voluntary sector, replacing old Left ideas about the primacy of government and 1980s New Right ideas about the separation of spheres between the voluntary and public sectors, such that the one could be encouraged to substitute for the other (Giddens 1998).

Despite the commitment to increase the involvement of the voluntary sector in public service delivery, and to embed them within new partnership arrangements and funding streams, both VS organisations and government noted under New Labour that their relationship was not as 'effective as it should be' (Bourn 2005: 1). In particular, criticism focussed on the slow and patchy progress of The Compact and other measures that might have enabled a more rapid expansion of voluntary sector involvement in practice.

2.2.2 Conservative-led coalition Government: 'The Big Society'

Immediately before the 2010 UK general election, all the major political parties positioned the VS as a central player in the delivery of public services because the expansion of its responsibility for welfare was set to continue, and intensify, in the face of austerity (Alcock 2010). The General Election of 2010 witnessed the formation of a Coalition government between the Conservative (Cameron) and Liberal Democrat (Clegg) parties. David Cameron's verdict on Labour's 1997 manifesto declaration that "local decision-making should be less constrained by central government, and also more accountable to local people" was as follows:

They have completely failed to live up to this pledge. In 2007 the Ministry of Justice published a 'Governance of Britain' green paper which (correctly) stated that, "power remains too centralised and too concentrated in government hands".

David Cameron consequently pledged to give cooperatives, charities and social enterprises much greater involvement in the running of public services. In addition, he sought to promote greater initiative for individuals to become involved in their communities (Pattie and Johnston 2011; Milbourne and Cushman 2012). This idea was manifested in the Coalition government's 'Big Society' agenda (Corbett and Walker 2012, 2013; Macmillan 2013) which stemmed from the idea that "civil society and the third sector were better-adapted agents of social reform than a highly centralised government" (Espiet-Kilty 2018: 220). Part of the reason for this policy, and the Government's wider approach, was due to the particularly tough fiscal climate that the Coalition government inherited. The economic and political conditions under which the VS operated changed dramatically in the post-2008 recession years. By the end of 2009/10 net public sector debt had reached £956.4bn (62 per cent of GDP), while the budget deficit stood at £103.9bn (6.9 per cent of GDP) (Lupton and Thomson 2015). The burdensome financial conditions resulted in the 'new austerity' which

referred to the biggest package of cuts to public services and benefits seen in decades. The introduction of these enormous cuts in public expenditure were announced in the 2010 ‘Spending Review’ and came in the form of the government’s post-2010 austerity programme which reflected a commitment to reduce the country’s deficit.

As part of the programme of austerity to reduce public spending, David Cameron introduced the Welfare Reform Act 2012. Policies under this Act included the benefit cap and other specialised reforms such as universal credit, personal independence payment and the ‘bedroom tax’ (Levitas 2012; Makowiecki 2015; Field and Forsey 2016; Millar and Bennett 2017; Larkin 2018). The Coalition (2010 to 2015) and Conservative (2015 to present) governments were determined to dismantle the welfare state that was accused of being responsible for: dependency; deviant behaviours and, to a certain extent, chronic poverty by enabling and permitting long-term unemployment (Espiet-Kilty 2018). This, Cameron decided, would be achieved through a tightening of fiscal policies and an emphasis on alternative providers of welfare, such as the voluntary sector via the ‘Big Society’. The ‘Big Society’ discourse was a central component of the programme intended for structural reform that would change the delivery of service provision. This policy claimed to be the reintroduction of communitarian politics, which handed power over to communities and away from the state (Macmillan 2013). The ‘Big Society’ was announced as a driving ambition of the coalition government and supposedly represented an imagined future; a vision for change and an answer to the problem of ‘broken’ Britain (Defty 2014). The aim was to deliver radical reforms to achieve “a stronger society, a smaller state and responsibility in the hands of every citizen” (Cabinet Office 2010 :8). It represented a transition within Britain and a power shift from “big government to big society” where ideas came from the ground up and not the top-down (Cameron 2009b). The decentralisation of many aspects of government services meant the emphasis was placed upon community-led schemes that advanced local services, local environments and the local way of life (Whittle 2010). The role of government in this was simply to support altruistic communities and active citizens:

“Because we believe that a strong society will solve our problems more effectively than big government has or ever will, we want the state to act as an instrument for helping to create a strong society...Our alternative to big government is the big society.” (David Cameron 2009)

The shift away from New Labour’s rhetoric of joined-up services, partnerships and new localism were replaced with the Big Society agenda. Arrangements under this policy would focus on local volunteers, entrepreneurial activities, and cross-sector delivery of public

services (Aspden and Birch 2005). The ‘Big Society’ policy programme was intended to distance the Party, and later the government, from the supposed big state politics of New Labour. The central idea was that the VS, re-characterised as ‘civil society’, would be freed from: Labour control and bureaucracy; state failure and market neo-liberalism which was at that time closely associated with the 2008 economic recession (Alcock 2012). The vision of the ‘Big Society’ was to position the VS at the forefront of social renewal (Coote 2010).

Despite the narrative suggesting a positive step towards greater inclusion and autonomy for the VS, the Big Society’s theoretical and ideological underpinnings have been widely examined, and its prospects for changing British society have been scrutinised (e.g., Alcock 2010; Kisby 2010; Evans 2011; Hunter 2011; Taylor 2011; Albrow 2012; Lowndes and Pratchett 2012; Sullivan 2012; Buser 2013; Clarke and Cochrane 2013; Corbett and Walker 2013). Many have questioned whether the Big Society truly represented a revolutionary shift in power, or whether it simply offered political cover for an ideological attack on the public sector and welfare state (Hilton and McKay 2011; Harris 2012; Hilton 2012)⁷. Although the ‘Big Society’ was framed as a bottom-up initiative, Milbourne and Cushman (2015) argue that it was a top-down enforcement that oppressed community empowerment and prevented the sector from flourishing and acting on its own aims and mission (Milbourne and Cushman 2015). Furthermore, Jacobs and Manzi (2012) note that whilst the ‘Big Society’ intended to promote positive social change through increased community involvement and voluntary action, the opposite occurred and the ‘Big Society’ was used to disguise divisive ideological and political action. Despite the Government’s attempt to avoid the impression that the ‘Big Society’ was a continuation of Thatcher-era neoliberal policies of privatisation (Sage 2012), Whelan (2012: 2) asserts “the ideology underlying ‘Big Society’ echoes former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher’s relentless rejection of the welfare state”. Others have claimed that the very idea of this policy which prioritises the minimising of state intervention, is at the core of neoliberalism (Harvey 2007; Ong 2006; Pratt 2001). Furthermore, Nevile (2010) remarks that Labour’s preference for outsourcing to third sector providers who secure a level of public trust by acting in the public good has now been superseded by a market where size and price displace intrinsic value. Where markets are rationalised to drive down costs, trust in services and providers may be

⁷ The Big Society has had a troubled history acknowledged by repeated re-launches of the initiative. Over a twelve-month period (2011-12) it was the focus of a third sector commission, a parliamentary inquiry and an audit, all of whom argued that the ‘Big Society’ lacks a clear and meaningful definition (ACEVO 2011: 5); a coherent plan for implementation (House of Commons 2011: 55), and ‘a common vision and strategy, particularly the voluntary sector’ (Civil Exchange 2012: 8).

lost; and where much public money has been withdrawn from local projects, new community organisers will face a challenging task of rebuilding trust relationships with user groups or their representatives (Milbourne and Cushman 2012).

2.2.3 The voluntary sector's current position

Throughout the Cameron-Clegg Coalition from 2010 to 2015 and the 2015-2016 conservative majority under Cameron, the identity and independence of the VS were under threat. Aiken and Harris (2017: 333) comment that the social policies of that time eroded the distinctive features of the sector. Unsurprisingly, the relationship between the state and the VS soured following Cameron's term as the toxic promise for a 'Big Society' was met with poor delivery. The subsequent Prime Minister elected in 2016, Theresa May, publicly criticised her predecessor's 'Big Society' policy as representing, what appeared to be, the withdrawal of government from social problems. She claimed that communities and volunteers were left to tackle Britain's societal issues alone (Third Sector 2017). Giving the Charity Commission's annual lecture in January 2017, Theresa May stated her expectation for the VS to participate in the implementation of the 'Shared Society'. Underpinning the 'Shared Society' was the premise that "networks of families, communities and citizens will care for one another and both government and the third sector will play a part in tackling social issues" (Aiken and Harris 2017: 333). Like with Cameron's 'Big Society', Theresa May seemed to believe in the value of citizens as the main agents of their own welfare, rather than in the central government's welfare policies. Again, as with Cameron's 'Big Society', the pillars of May's 'Shared Society' were civil society and social enterprises:

"We are a country built on the bonds of family, community, citizenship and there is no greater example of the strength of those bonds than our great movement of charities and social enterprises".

May's 'Shared Society' acknowledged that in the wake of the referendum, Britain remained a polarised and divided nation, segmented across geographies, background and attitudes. In the Prime Minister's view, to tackle these social injustices, the emphasis needed to be on the sector and government working together. Underpinning this policy was a desire to move away from the laissez-faire liberalism that had been favoured during the austere years and towards a government that was willing to step up, support and encourage the work of the VS (Civil Exchange 2017). The extent to which this was achieved has been widely debated.

Williams (2017:12) for example, questions whether the agenda is “yet another gimmick, a previous policy revamp under a different name, or distinctly different and more practical”.

In both, the ‘Big Society’ and the ‘Shared Society’, government remained in the realms of communitarian politics; moving away from individualism to focus on networks and relationships as the cornerstone for care (Aiken and Harris 2017). The ‘Shared Society’ policy has been met with scepticism particularly because it quite closely resembles the language, ideas and ‘defunct policy’ of the ‘Big Society’. It arguably suffers from the common problem of reality versus political rhetoric. Consequently, many are finding the shadow of past initiatives difficult to ignore (Civil Exchange 2017). The aspiration of successive governments for a reformed and retreated state has been constant and remains. The current political discourse continues to frame VOs as effective and efficient ‘alternative providers’ of services to the state. Moreover, despite political agreement that the sector should play a key role in delivering services, debate permeates around, not only the exact role and structure of the sector, but also of the state’s interest in harnessing the sector and what that means for the sector’s autonomy, independence and distinctiveness. Consequently, the British welfare state remains in the throes of a radical transformation as the Conservative government continues to tackle retrenchment. It has subsequently been argued that voluntary organisations are being “organisationally eroded” due to funding, regulation and the overall policy environment and therefore have limited capacity to meet the needs of society (Aiken and Harris 2017: 338). Key issues for the VS include: the continued drive for greater formalisation; the risk of ‘mission drift’; the potential erosion of the sector’s independence, distinctiveness and advocacy function; and the marginalisation of the sector’s policy-shaping role (Flynn 1996; Lewis 1996; Scott and Russell 2001).

2.2.4 Section summary

The first part of this review chapter has provided the contextual details of the changing operating environment within which VOs are located. Against the backdrop of a ‘retreating’ state, this chapter has explored the increasing emergence of the VS as a key provider of public services since the 1970s. In particular, it has described the policy discourses and practices that have shaped VS-government relations over the past four decades; from Thatcher’s neoliberal agenda of NPM to the Third Way agenda of New Labour, through to the austerity agenda of the Conservatives. Through this historical account, this chapter has depicted the unyielding interdependence between the VS and the state (Salamon et al 2000).

This interdependence has been presented as a response to the changing funding landscape which has been characterised by a gradual but accelerating shift from grant-funded services to contract-funded services. This chapter has consequently, conveyed the hierarchical dependence on outsourced funding and has thereby highlighted the asymmetric power relationship that continues to cause tension. While much of the political narrative presented throughout this chapter may suggest that the state provides an overarching supportive framework for the sector's activities, the relationship, has for some time, maintained a tension between the sector's autonomy and independence with demands for greater efficiency and accountability at the centre (Wittenberg 2006).

In the remainder of this chapter, I will explore this tension between the sector's autonomy and independence and the need for greater efficiency and accountability, in greater detail. Specifically, I will examine how, as a consequence of the changing economic and political landscape, the VS and organisations within it are being forced to 'professionalise' to ensure they maintain funding for their continued survival. It will explore what it means, operationally, for VOs to be more professional with specific attention given to funders' demands for improved performance measurement.

2.3 What does professionalisation mean in a voluntary context?

The increasing involvement of the VS in the delivery of public services has resulted in greater pressure upon VOs to adapt. Not least, the aforementioned shift in the funding landscape from grants to contracts which ultimately gave government greater control over the sector in terms of the activities it funds has meant strict efficiency, accountability and transparency measures that mandate the nature of delivery. These new requirements mean that in order for VOs to maintain funding, they must deliver services in a way that satisfies the expectations of funders, namely government. The government desire for a sector that is variously: more professional, more 'business-like', more efficient and more accountable has received a great deal of attention (Broadbridge and Parsons 2003). This professionalisation process has been referred to as the 'business-like' phenomenon within volunteering studies and is now, a well-established global phenomenon that receives ever-growing attention from management and organisation studies (Dart 2004; Knutsen 2012; Maier et al 2014; Berry 2015; Sanders 2015). Despite this, findings within the field are mixed and the body of literature is replete with ambiguity. Many have attributed the ambiguity to the simultaneous use of various concepts by scholars to describe the formalisation of the sector, they include:

professionalisation, managerialisation, marketisation and corporatisation (Maier and Meyer 2011). The synonymous use of these concepts make it challenging for scholars to: position their work in a larger context; build on previous findings and identify research gaps. Thus, investigations and findings related to the ‘business-like’ phenomenon often raise more questions for academics, practitioners and policymakers than they answer.

Dart (2004) offers some conceptual clarity in his useful definition of the ‘business-like non-profit’. Dart (2004) acknowledges the problem of the ‘business-like’ term for research and consequently developed a typology to aid a better understanding of what being ‘business-like’ means and represents for VOs. Dart (2004) attributes the vagueness and ambiguity of the in situ meaning of the term ‘business-like’ to the overly simplistic connotations attached to it that have few specific referents. He notes that within this body of literature, there is no clear distinction between *kinds* of business-like activity. He argues that the ‘business-like’ concept is only clearly distinguished in the literature in terms of what it means for organisational *goals*. He alleges that understandings of the concept in terms of other important organisational dimensions such as behaviour, values, processes, and structures are much less clear. He thus made a first step toward developing the ‘business-like’ term into a more clearly defined concept. He proposes that becoming business-like comprises several analytic categories: business-like rhetoric, business-like organisation, and business-like goals. Each of these categories will be examined separately below.

2.3.1 Business-like organisation

The first of Dart’s (2004) analytic categories, business-like organisation, is concerned with both the nature of service delivery and the nature of management. Business-like organisation with regards to service delivery refers to the ‘becoming business-like’ of core and support processes within VOs. It entails the restructuring of service delivery to produce higher volumes of more efficient, more measurably effective and less interpersonal services (Dart 2004). Business-like organisation with regards to management entails a shift in managerial focus from simply ‘doing good’ to strategically operating a business entity. King (2017: 244) echoes this sentiment in his account of how “non-profit practitioners” undergo a subtle and complex transformation from “idealistic dreamer” interested in doing “social good” to “a non-profit professional” concerned with professionalising the business.

The formalisation of core and support processes and management within VOs has elsewhere, been referred to as organisational rationalisation (Ganesh 2005; Hwang and

Powell 2009). Hwang and Powell (2009) found that the need to produce strategic plans, independent financial audits and quantitative programme evaluations represented a broad, seismic shift toward organisational rationalisation within the VS. According to them, these practices locate rationality inside the organisation (strategic planning) and establish specific substantive and financial areas for analysis (quantitative programme evaluations and financial audits, respectively). In this sense, and as in Dart's (2004) 'business-like organisation' category, rationalisation exposes organisations to a multitude of institutional pressures and expectations, and VOs become interpenetrated with, and further subject to, changes in the external environment. Similarly, Hvenmark (2013) refers to these developments as 'managerialism', that is, the belief that organisations can and should be built on corporate management knowledge and practices. In his review of 105 peer-reviewed articles in VS studies, Hvenmark (2013) warns that the concept of managerialism is so broadly defined that it runs the risk of losing its analytical powers. To avoid this, his paper calls for a more precise conceptual use of managerialism and suggests a distinction be made between it and managerialisation. The former, he claims, is an ideologically laden belief that organisations could or should be coordinated, controlled and developed through corporate management knowledge and practices. Managerialisation, on the other hand, is the process through which organisational actors are increasingly turning this ideological belief into practice. The confusion surrounding the operationalisation of 'business-like organisation' has been noted elsewhere and attempts have been made to offer further clarity (see: corporatisation (Alexander and Weiner 1998), marketisation (Salamon 1993; Eikenberry and Kluver 2004) and commodification (Logan and Wekerle 2008)).

2.3.2 Business-like goals

The second of Dart's (2004) analytic categories, business-like goals, refers to the way that VOs are increasingly adopting business orientated goals. This pertains to "goals which are primarily, importantly or solely about revenue generation, profit, or financial surplus" (Dart 2004: 297). Within this category, Dart (2004) highlights the increasing difficulty that VOs face in their attempts to secure funding. It also emphasises the objective of many VOs to intensify their focus on revenue generation to ensure their sustained survival. In a systematic review of 599 works (578 journal articles, 17 books, 4 book chapters), Maier et al (2016) analysed work in connection with the aspects of becoming business-like in respect of Dart's analytic categories. They found that 'business-like goals' are most directly referred to in the

literature by the concepts of commercialisation and conversion. Since Dart's (2004) publication, government funding to the VS has become increasingly difficult to secure and this has resulted in a surge of interest exploring the economic rationales of VOs. The conventional wisdom of VS revenue is that diversification is favourable because it allows VOs to establish and maintain multiple funding streams as a means of protecting against risk (Carroll and Stater 2009). Studies have found that revenue diversification can: achieve a more efficient portfolio (Grasse et al 2016); avoid excessive dependence on a single funding source (Froelich 1999; Hodge and Piccolo 2005); enhance financial stability and capacity (Carroll and Stater 2009; Lam and McDougle 2016) and reduce the risk of financial vulnerability in the face of fiscal shocks (Tevel et al 2015; Lin and Wang 2016). However, some scholarly interest has advocated for revenue concentration due to the higher transaction costs and the administrative complexity associated with multiple funding streams (Frumkin and Keating 2011; de Los Mozos et al 2016). Dart's (2004) analysis usefully argues that commercial goals and non-profit goals can, in fact, be compatible in at least a limited and constrained sense. He notes that the desire to balance both is ever-present. This is contrary to popular findings which suggest that business-like goals may not be compatible with non-profit, prosocial goals and values. This line of inquiry argues that business-like goals may degrade the 'values focus' that characterises many VOs.

2.3.3 Business-like rhetoric

The third and final of Dart's (2004) analytic categories is business-like rhetoric. Different from the other categories that are substantive in nature, this dimension resides in the realm of discourse and emphasises social construction. Dart's (2004) study found that general business-like rhetoric was conventional, but the use of business language was 'thin' in the sense that it was not tied to decisions or behaviour. He states:

“Although language may have been laden with business references as a means to establishing legitimacy in the institutional sense (Suchman 1995) and to perhaps reinforce new ideas of organisational culture, many of these instances may have been a simple linguistic veneer layered over other kinds of organisational agendas and practices. Sounding commercial in the non-profit sector could be framed in this way as a management fad (Abrahamson 1996) that has elements that are organisationally neutral and of modest importance.”

This analysis suggests that business-like rhetoric, although frequently used, was often superficial, perhaps a further attempt by voluntary sector leaders to convince funders that they understand business principles and how to operationalise them.

2.4 Imposition of professionalisation and performance criteria

The remainder of this chapter examines what being business-like or professional means, operationally, for VOs. Broadbridge and Parsons (2003: 729) observe: “professionalisation is often used as a catchall phrase embracing a plethora of unexamined changes”. An integral and popular concept within the professionalisation literature is performance management. This section of the review therefore seeks to discriminately provide clarity on the three most widely cited changes that have been couched in terms of ‘performance management’ within the literature, they include the efficiency, accountability and transparency of VOs (Carman 2009; Smith 2010; Tomlinson and Schwabenland 2010; Wijkstrom 2011). The problem of measuring performance in the voluntary context are highlighted by most who write of it, challenges include: the intangible nature of many services that are offered by VOs; the lack of a financial bottom line within VOs and the ambiguous and aspirational nature of VOs’ goals that make assessment difficult (Dacombe 2011).

The driving force behind VS performance measurement has emanated from the sector’s emergence as a specific focus of government policy (Dacombe 2011). Increased ‘partnership’ between the state and the sector has brought the VS within the performance management regimes favoured by the state (Carman 2009) and this has resulted in the sector being subjected to forms of performance management that have their origins in other sectors (Morris et al 2015; LeRoux and Wright 2010; Manville and Broad 2013; Panchamia and Thomas 2014). These shifts have resulted in a new mode of control wherein governments can specify the outcomes they want to achieve and translate them into performance metrics using VOs as the vehicle. Ultimately, pressures for performance measurement emanate from stakeholders, primarily funders, whose demands for performance reporting are associated with their desire to assess outputs, outcomes and social impact against rendered funding (Arvidson and Lyon 2014). Such expectations require the documentation and communication of organisational performance.

A wide range of tools are used to measure performance in the VS, including financial metrics, outcome measurement models, internal evaluations and capacity assessments (Benjamin and Campbell 2015). In the UK charity sector, public reporting is informed by the

extant Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP) prepared by the Charity Commission. The SORP provides an interpretation of how accepted accounting practice and legislation applies to charities. It offers guidance on how to give a true and fair view of the organisation's financial activities and affairs. Recent developments in charity accounting have witnessed: the replacement of recommended practice with mandatory requirements; an emphasis on the reporting of operational performance and financial results, as well as reduced preparer discretion (Ryan et al 2014; Connolly et al 2015). The pressures to measure coincide with increasing financial cutbacks, rising demand for services and a move towards the adoption of business principles (Salamon et al 2000; Meyer and Simsa 2014). Quite simply, VS performance measurement is about providing information regarding the monitoring and evaluation of how an organisation is performing in relation to its goals. However, the narrative in the literature highlights the confusion associated with *how* VOs can best measure their performance (see: Moxham 2009; Carman 2010; Packard 2010). Commenting on the "explosion of methodologies and tools for assessing social performance and impact" in the VS, Ebrahim and Rangan (2010: 33) highlight how the lack of clarity is exacerbated by the abundance of long lists containing hundreds of different performance measurement tools that are intended to guide VOs (Lynch-Cerullo and Cooney 2011). Similarly, Connolly et al (2015: 176) acknowledge "given the importance placed by a range of stakeholders on performance information, further studies relating to what is meant by performance, how it might be measured and reported and what emphasis stakeholders place on it would seem appropriate".

Moxham (2014) offers some clarity with her systematic literature review that examines how and why performance is measured in VOs. She found that amongst the 55 papers analysed, there were three primary drivers for performance measurement in VOs, they included: accountability, legitimacy and improved efficiency. The following section delineates how these three drivers have been understood in VS research and applied in VOs.

2.4.1 Accountability

Moxham's (2014) first driver of performance measurement is accountability which is defined as "being answerable to stakeholders for the actions of the organization, whether by internal or external initiation" (Christensen and Ebrahim 2006: 196). While many have noted the need for further academic investigation into accountability within the VS (Ebrahim 2005; Ball and Osborne 2011; Valentinov 2011; Benjamin 2012; Ryan et al 2014), there is agreement among

scholars that the VS's accountability environment is characterised by a great deal of complexity (Kearns 1996; Ebrahim 2003; Costa and Pesci 2016). This complexity occurs for two reasons. Firstly, the presence of multiple, heterogeneous stakeholders with differing expectations (Unerman and O'Dwyer 2006; Dhanani and Connolly 2012; Connolly et al 2013) and secondly, the ever-changing operating environment that forces VOs to constantly re-direct their accountability strategies toward different types of stakeholders and new stakeholders' claims (Costa et al 2011). Put simply, VOs must routinely consider and review: who they are accountable to; what they are accountable for; and what mechanisms they should use to demonstrate their accountability (Ebrahim et al 2010). Unsurprisingly, default descriptions of accountability have highlighted the importance of taking a stakeholder-based approach where answerability to donors, funding sources, and government are emphasised (Edwards and Hulme 1996; Najam 1996). Similarly, regulations, policy documents and funding requirements ensure VOs respond to the concerns of governments, donors, and trustees (Benjamin 2012).

Christensen and Ebrahim (2006:196) highlight the multiple accountability paths present within VOs: "non-profit organizations can be accountable on multiple levels: upward, lateral, and downward". Upward accountability is concerned with being held accountable from above, namely to funders, trustees and government. Lateral accountability is conceived as responsibility to staff, volunteers and community partners. Downward accountability is conceptualised as being responsible to the needs of beneficiaries where public trust is central (Christensen and Ebrahim 2006; Ebrahim et al 2010). While scholarly work suggests that VOs view their relationship with beneficiaries as principally important (Chaskin 2003: 182; Ospina et al 2002), extant literature predominantly concludes that measuring outcomes is something that is done primarily *for* funders (Carman 2007; Christensen and Ebrahim 2006; Hwang and Powell 2009; Benjamin 2012). This prioritisation of funder expectations is likely due to resource constraints which means that VOs must rely on funders to disseminate support and resources for their survival. Funders, in turn, have more influence than other stakeholder groups, resulting in an emphasis on "accountability upwards" (Ebrahim 2003: 314). This has led many to conclude that VOs demonstrate strongest accountability towards boards and donors and weakest accountability towards communities and beneficiaries (Costa et al 2011; Mook et al 2016; Ryan et al 2014). This pattern of asymmetric power is becoming more prevalent across the world as grant-making moves from a previous position of 'fund it and forget it' (Leat 2006) to a view that sees funding as an investment that requires an understanding of 'value for money' (Ostrander 2007). Here, the continuity of Thatcher's

‘competitive contracts’ is palpable as value for money metrics now also characterise the VS funding landscape.

The constant re-evaluation of where VOs should direct accountability was acknowledged by Little (2005) who highlighted how the sector must re-negotiate service contracts on a yearly basis for activities which may require a longer timeframe. According to Little (2005), the challenges of insecure, short-term, single-year funding cycles are manifold. For example, short term contracts allow only a small window of opportunity to demonstrate a project’s value and impact before funding concludes. Moreover, funding agreements are often made well into the financial year, leaving organisations to spend their funding and deliver results in a highly compressed period of time. Finally, re-applying for short-term funding is a time-consuming and resource-intensive activity, particularly for smaller organisations, who end up spending a disproportionate amount of time identifying potential funding at the expense of running projects. The time and resource required for the process can ultimately dissuade some VOs from bidding altogether (Moxham et al 2007; Buckingham 2009; Third Sector Finance Network 2020).

2.4.2 Legitimacy

Moxham’s (2014) second driver of performance measurement is legitimacy. The legitimacy of VOs is most often measured as behavioural accountability, that is, the degree to which the organisation does what it claims. When a VO is deemed legitimate, often it is because it is perceived as operating in accordance with “a particular set of rules or standards (Collingwood 2006: 444). The Charity Commission’s reporting guidelines may be regarded as one such source of legitimacy (Connolly et al 2009) and may in turn, influence an organisation’s reporting practices. Performance measurement activities are motivated by the external desire for VOs to legitimise their activities, thus, the relationship between legitimacy and accountability is central (Dhanani and Connolly 2012). Management can obtain legitimacy by deploying different accountability mechanisms to demonstrate that the values, beliefs and successes of the organisation are commensurate with stakeholder expectations and demands (Gray et al 1995).

Organisational legitimacy is essential within the VS because of its affiliation with brand, reputation and successful fundraising activities (Lecy et al 2012). Brand, differentiation and affiliations with successful campaigns or popular causes enable organisations to: raise funds; gain access to policy processes and recruit support from

partners or donors (Lecy et al 2012). Put simply, legitimacy is concerned with the long-term survival and success of VOs due to their reliance upon the support of their resource providers. To gain this support and approval, management must navigate the expectations of multiple, and sometimes competing, stakeholders. As Gill and Wells (2014: 27) note, VOs play a “legitimacy game” whereby legitimacy is not only a measurement of behaviour but is also a larger rhetorical endeavour that involves the creation and maintenance of messages that “ring true” to donors, volunteers and service users. Voluntary leaders spend a great deal of energy trying to maintain and enhance their organisation’s legitimacy because an event that causes a loss of legitimacy can lead to the abrupt curtailment of an organisation. The danger in striving for greater external legitimacy is that the VO may decouple from its civil society origins and from the meanings and purposes that ground it with members, service users or community stakeholders.

2.4.3 Improved efficiency and effectiveness

Moxham’s (2014) third driver of performance measurement is improved efficiency and effectiveness. Scholars have long commented on the need for robust mechanisms of management within VOs to improve their efficiency and effectiveness (Dart 2004; Macedo and Pinho 2006; Moxham et al 2007; Rodrigues and Pinho 2010; Sanders and McClellan 2014; Arvidson and Lyon 2014). Discussions of efficiency and effectiveness are pervasive within the performance measurement literature whereby metrics are used to quantify the efficiency and effectiveness of organisational actions. Such metrics gather financial, non-financial, internal and external information. The increased demands from external stakeholders to measure performance, along with the “crisis of accountability” are two trends that have shaped the contemporary context within which the majority of VOs now engage in some formalised method of evaluation or performance measurement (Morley et al 2001; Carman 2007). In light of the changing accountability culture within VOs, the desire for improved efficiency and effectiveness relates to both, service delivery (Moxham 2013), and resource use (Najam 1996; Connolly et al 2013; Valencia et al 2015).

The adoption of performance measurement systems assume that information generated will be purposefully utilised by managers to make better-informed decisions about the organisation’s future (Greiling 2006; LeRoux and Wright 2010). However, the discussion on improved efficiency and effectiveness in the voluntary sector is relatively recent and the literature is fragmented. Despite this, the latent assumption is that the application of

performance measurement instruments can optimise the performance and efficiency of any organisation in any situation (Carman 2007; Moxham 2009, 2014). This assumption derives from the application of performance measurement systems in the public and private sectors, where this body of literature originated and is most developed (Taylor and Taylor 2016). Consequently, VS literature has looked to these sectors for guidance on effective performance management implementation (Aiken and Bode 2009; Carnochan et al 2014). However, many have commented on the sector's inherent diversity and this not only poses difficulties regarding criteria to measure performance, but also, invites the question of how far generic management control frameworks can be used within a voluntary context. On the one hand, there is an argument that measuring the performance of organisations across sectors is not distinctly different (Moxham 2009). Opponents of this view (Callen et al 2010; Dacombe 2011) argue that VOs operate in a unique context which requires them to “develop different and more complex accountability systems to satisfy the competing claims of multiple stakeholders” (Costa et al 2011: 475).

2.4.4 Effect of Performance measurement

As depicted above, professionalisation in the VS largely refers to the ways that VOs are being pressured to enhance their accountability, legitimacy and effectiveness. While some argue that these developments are self-imposed by VOs trying to provide the best service (Cairns et al 2005), others are more cynical, believing that these developments are due to isomorphism. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) describe isomorphism as the process of an organisation conforming to dominant arrangements in the surrounding organisational environment. This idea is rooted in institutional theory and describes how both, deliberate and accidental choices lead institutions to mirror the norms, values and ideologies of the ‘organisational field’ (DiMaggio and Powell 1983: 147). Organisational fields are comprised of the array of stakeholders within which an organisation interacts and shares a system of meaning (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Scott 2001). Within volunteering studies, institutional theory has been used as a theoretical framework to explain several aspects of organisational structure and performance. The concepts of institutional isomorphism and isomorphic processes help explain the processes and pressures leading to increased similarities among organisations operating in the same organisational field (DiMaggio and Powell 1991). DiMaggio and Powell (1983) identified three mechanisms through which institutional isomorphic change occurs: coercive, mimetic and normative isomorphism.

The first mechanism, coercive isomorphism, occurs where external agencies impose changes on organisations (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Here, the external actors that an organisation depends on, exert pressure upon these reliant organisations to conform with ‘proper’ organisational management practices before making any payments (Claeye and Jackson 2012). The second mechanism, mimetic isomorphism, describes the achievement of conformity through imitation of other organisations operating in the same organisational field (DiMaggio and Powell 1983: 151). Here, organisations gain legitimacy by adapting to contextual expectations and ‘myths’ that constitute collective notions and socially constructed norms in the institutional context concerning how organisations should be organised (Greenwood et al 2008). Such imitation often occurs when an organisation is going through a period of uncertainty because becoming isomorphic can assist organisations with navigating how to organise. This type of isomorphism is more freely chosen by organisations and mimics ‘what is happening out there’. Claeye and Jackson (2012) assert that this form of isomorphism refers to the institutional logics that prescribe what constitutes ‘appropriate’ management in VOs, and hence is perceived as a recipe for success. The third mechanism, normative isomorphism, stems primarily from professionalisation processes within an organisational field (DiMaggio and Powell 1983: 152) and thus, occurs as a result of professional standardisation. Normative pressures ‘pertain to what is widely considered a proper course of action, or even a moral duty’ (Boxenbaum and Jonsson 2008: 80).

The emphasis on increased disclosure by regulators and government are often perceived by VOs as coercive or punitive (Najam 1996; Ebrahim 2005, 2009). Hall and O’Dwyer (2017) note that the hierarchical forms of accountability that favour “accountability upwards” (Ebrahim 2003: 314) can have a detrimental impact on organisational mission, activities and values. This effect had been labelled ‘mission drift’ (Ebrahim 2003; Christensen and Ebrahim 2006; Jones 2007; O’Dwyer and Unerman 2008; Hudson 2010; Bennett and Savani 2011; Billis 2010; Milbourne 2013; Rochester 2013; Agyemang et al 2017). Studies on mission drift have been mainly negative and critical (Bennett and Savani 2011). For example, Jones (2007) refers to the ‘threats’ to VO mission wherein increased reporting and bureaucratisation are conceptualised as a burden that is unrepresentative of charitable goals and vision. The effect of mission drift on the experiences of volunteers has seldom been explored as observed by Valeau et al (2019) who comment “so far, the problem of the influence of commercialization on voluntary work has been poorly verified empirically”. Valeau et al (2019) observe that over time, the influence of rank-and-file stakeholders, that is, stakeholders without any specific grade or status, declines following

their initial involvement in generating and mobilising momentum for community effectiveness. However, Valeau et al (2019) suggest that maintaining the influence of rank-and-file members by reintroducing grassroots volunteers as “forgotten yet useful stakeholders” during the professionalisation process may guarantee a better balance between economic and community effectiveness.

2.5 Section summary

This chapter has been presented in two parts, which reflect two broad, but popular streams of research in extant volunteering literature, i.e., the issue of professionalisation at both a macro and meso-level of analysis. In the first part, the political and economic context within which this study is situated was examined (that is, the macro or sector-level of analysis). Herein, emphasis was placed on the sector’s changing role in the provision of public services as well as the interdependent sector-state relationship. The purpose was to synthesise research to broaden understanding of the sector’s current position in its wider societal context. In the second part, the sector’s response to its changing operating environment through the imposition of professionalisation and performance criteria was presented (i.e., the meso or organisational-level of analysis). Much of this has focussed on the negative impact that extra-organisational change has had upon VOs e.g., “mission drift” (Macmillan 2010:7) as well as a diminishing sense of: autonomy, innovation and community action (Milbourne and Cushman 2012). This chapter presents the external desire for professionalisation as being conditioned by recession and austerity. This chapter has explored the politicisation of the VS through the imposition of professionalisation and performance criteria. While these bodies of work have provided valuable insights into the study of volunteering, much less attention has been paid to the micro or individual-level of analysis. In other words, the effects of widespread change on volunteers and their experiences have been bypassed; it is to this end that the following chapter contributes.

Chapter Three: Literature Review (part two)

The Meaning of Volunteering

3.1 Introduction

The first review chapter (Chapter 2) examined the external political and economic environment within which this research is situated. Moreover, it laid the foundation for this second review chapter, which presents and critiques pertinent research as it relates to volunteers' experiences. The two review chapters are inextricably linked to the extent that the everchanging operating environment has far-reaching implications for those who are, to varying degrees, responsible for service delivery. The multifaceted and nuanced ways in which volunteers understand, experience and negotiate their volunteering efforts are the subject of this research. In providing a more nuanced picture of volunteering, this research captures the complexities associated with volunteers' experiences. Many have observed the paucity of quality empirical research which reports on situated volunteer experiences (see: Broadfoot et al 2008; Musick and Wilson 2008; Smith and Greenwood 2014; Mackenzie et al 2015; Wilks 2016; Smith et al 2018). Upon noting the uneven attention paid to the various 'stages' of volunteering in extant literature, Omoto and Snyder (1995) developed the 'volunteer process model'. In their view, the process of volunteering involves three sequential and interactive 'stages' over the life course of volunteers. They include: the causes, experiences and consequences of volunteering. The middle stage of volunteering, the *experience* of volunteering, they (and others) argue, remains somewhat neglected in comparison to the other two stages (the *causes* and *consequences* of volunteering).

To contribute to this empirical gap, the ideas and debates presented in this chapter coalesce around the 'meaning' of volunteering, that is, the ways in which volunteers ascribe meaning to their activity to understand and make sense of their efforts. As observed by Daher (2017), experience and meaning are two constructs that are inextricably linked; to capture an individual's experience, it is necessary to first understand the meanings that they ascribe to the phenomenon under study. The concept of 'meaning', despite being intuitively simple, is difficult to define (Rosso et al 2010). von Essen (2016) highlights this conceptual challenge by presenting 'meaning' as referring to both, the conceptual or cognitive meaning and to the existential or emotive meaning. Put simply, meaning refers to both, the cognitive meaning of concepts and to the perceived meaning in life. This chapter synthesises and examines extant

literature concerning ‘meaning’ from these two analytical perspectives to uncover the ways that volunteers perceive, conceptualise and experience their volunteering. The chapter reviews these two analytical perspectives in turn. The first perspective, the cognitive meaning of volunteering, explores how volunteers conceptualise their activity. Within extant literature, the conceptualisation of volunteering has predominantly been presented as either, a leisure activity or as a form of unpaid work. The second perspective, the existential meaning of volunteering, explores how volunteers experience and value that activity. Here, attention is paid to the sense of purpose and identity that volunteers derive from their activity.

3.2 Cognitive meaning of volunteering

To firstly address the ‘meaning’ of volunteering from the conceptual or cognitive point of view, this section of the chapter presents and synthesises research that explores how volunteers ascribe meaning to their activity. Meaning, in the conceptual sense, refers to the subjective process of interpretation that individuals undergo in order to a) make sense of the world around them and b) assign meaning to their actions (Gray et al 1985). Pratt and Ashforth (2003) note that meaning can be constructed individually (from a person’s own perceptions), socially (from norms or shared perceptions), or through a combination of both. In this view, therefore, meaning is a socially constructed phenomenon (Berger and Luckmann 1966). The challenge herein, is in defining what a volunteer is, as well as what constitutes a voluntary activity (Handy et al 2000). Handy et al (2000:46) note there is “no clear-cut definition that encompasses all aspects of volunteering” which is due to the vast diversity of VOs that comprise the VS and the broad range of volunteer motivations to join specific organisations or causes (Handy et al 2000; Dekker and Halman 2003; Meijs et al 2003). This conceptual ambiguity makes it difficult to theorise the various ways in which volunteers understand and experience their volunteering efforts and the significance they attach to them in relation to the self.

A useful starting point is to examine the characteristics that an act must possess in order to legitimately be considered volunteering. The literature search revealed three (or sometimes four) common and accepted characteristics. Voluntary work must be: non-obligatory; carried out for the benefit of others; unpaid, and somewhat less common, it must take place in an organised context (Dekker and Halman 2003; Cnaan et al 1996; Paine et al 2010; Rochester et al 2010). The recently published *Palgrave Handbook of Volunteering, Civic Participation, and Nonprofit Associations* (2016) defines volunteering as a valuable (or

useful) activity by an individual that is: (i) not remunerated (or at least not fully remunerated, given its market value), (ii) not coerced by biology, force, authority, or law and (iii) aimed at helping (a) the welfare/satisfactions of one or more other persons outside one's immediate family and household or (b) the welfare of the larger society, the environment, or the whole of human society globally (Smith et al 2016: 1411). While there is broad consensus and acceptance of these characteristics, various definitional issues within the literature remain, these will be explored in the following section.

3.2.1 Conceptual ambiguity

The conceptual ambiguity surrounding volunteering has been attributed to various issues within the literature. The first issue relates to the multiplicity of lenses and perspectives through which volunteering has been studied (Paine et al 2010). The second relates to the one-dimensional approach that scholars often take to volunteering research. The third relates to its lack of exploration in qualitative work. Each of these issues will be addressed in turn.

The first issue, the multiplicity of lenses and perspectives through which volunteering has been studied, reflects the historic treatment of volunteering in association with broader social phenomenon such as work, leisure, philanthropy and activism; indicating that volunteering is rarely conceptualised or investigated as a field in isolation. Instead, a light is shone upon volunteering through the perspective of one of these broader social phenomena where volunteering is located and studied as part of that broader activity (Paine et al 2010). The various lenses through which volunteering has been viewed have important implications for understandings of volunteering. Mapping the different lenses has advanced knowledge of the various functions of volunteering and its interconnectedness with other related activities.

However, without adequate theoretical explanation of volunteering in its own right, extant literature runs the risk of taking too narrow a view of the activity. Paine et al (2010) acknowledge, this can result in both, overemphasising some types of volunteering and ignoring others. In an attempt to offer some conceptual and theoretical clarity, Paine et al (2010) synthesised what each lens had to say about volunteering. In the interest of space, below is a table adapted from Paine et al's (2010) typology, which provides an overview of the various lenses and delineates how volunteering is conceptualised within each:

Lens	Field	Conceptualisation	Research Focus and Outcomes	Implications	Sources
Work	Economics, management and feminist theory.	<p>Volunteering has captivated the imagination of policy makers and politicians. Viewed as a job or productive activity that people do, for free, that adds value to goods and services. Volunteering can substitute for, compensate for or complement paid work.</p> <p>Benefits the local community and wider society.</p>	<p>Focus is on improving productivity.</p> <p>Questions asked: What is the value of the activity? What strategies can increase the value?</p> <p>A greater need for volunteer management (recruitment and development of volunteers)</p>	<p>Volunteering is reduced to its value as a productive output. Wider, more holistic benefits can be lost.</p> <p>Commodification, professionalisation and formalisation of volunteering. Ignores ingredients of volunteer engagement e.g., participation and voice'</p>	Jenkins (2005); Parsons (2006); Rodell (2013); Rochester et al (2010); Taylor (2004, 2005); Williams and Nadin (2012); Wilson and Musick (1997); Overgaard (2015, 2019); Keleman (2017); Stuart and Paine (2008)
Philanthropy	Economics, law and management studies.	<p>Volunteering is conceptualised as an act of charity and centres on the idea of service to others.</p> <p>Volunteer time is viewed as a resource, but the act is a 'gift'.</p> <p>Positioned alongside the state to deliver services (directly, in partnership, or indirectly).</p> <p>Benefits volunteers through a sense of belonging.</p>	<p>Focus is almost exclusively on 'formal' activities in organisational contexts that are typically large, well-organised and well-resourced.</p>	<p>Risk of commodifying volunteers' involvement</p> <p>This conceptualisation, to a large extent, de-politicises volunteering</p>	Lyons et al (1998); Cieslik (2015); Cotterill (1992)

Lens	Field	Conceptualisation	Research Focus and Outcomes	Implications	Sources
Activism	Sociology and politics.	<p>Incorporates aspects of self-help, mutual aid, advocacy and campaigning.</p> <p>Volunteering often conceptualised as being located in the volunteer's local community.</p> <p>Motivations rooted in self-help and mutual aid. Notions of management are something of an anathema. Emphasis on volunteer roles as emerging, developing and diversifying over time</p>	<p>Interested in smaller, less formal organisations and grass-roots associations.</p> <p>Volunteers are not a resource to be managed. They are the organisation, working together to meet shared needs and address common problems.</p> <p>Informal forms of volunteering are the focus (largely overlooked in literature).</p>	Excludes understanding of the larger more formalised advocacy organisations, which would likely place themselves within the activist sphere.	Rochester et al (2010)
Leisure	Predominantly Leisure studies.	<p>Like leisure, volunteering is (mostly) 'unobligated free time'. Absence of moral coercion.</p> <p>Volunteers are intrinsically motivated and get involved primarily out of self-interest, enjoyment, self-actualisation and self-expression.</p>	Focus on a) the enjoyment and satisfaction that volunteers gain from their involvement and b) the notion that volunteers get involved without coercion	Ignores the great diversity of volunteers, voluntary organisations and causes that exist.	Stebbins (1996, 2009, 2015).

Lens	Field	Conceptualisation	Research Focus and Outcomes	Implications	Sources
Care	Feminist studies	<p>The nature of care is something to be celebrated as a human strength (predominantly exhibited by women).</p> <p>Concerns over the lack of value and recognition attached to ‘care’ and the gender divisions that exist when it comes to who performs these activities.</p>	Only when adequate tools are created to measure and value unpaid informal caregiving will we have a better understanding of the social and economic costs of care and how this relates to an individual’s capacity to engage in the labour force	Fails to distinguish between care for family and friends and care for strangers; a crucial distinction when trying to delineate, categorise and understand volunteering.	Matsuba et al (2007); Steffen and Fothergill (2009); Zukewich (2003)
Participation	Focus of this lens comes from theories of participation, social capital and political engagement.	Refers to different types of participation, e.g., public participation which is engagement of individuals with the various structures and institutions of democracy can include: voting, being a councillor; social participation	Volunteering as a mechanism for getting people more involved in their communities and allowing people to participate in projects which address the problems they are facing	Conception of volunteering as ‘positive participation’ has underpinned government policy areas; seeing it as an overtly pro-social activity.	Smith and Holmes (2012); Blunkett (2003); Brodie et al (2010).
Learning	Management and organisational studies.	Contributing to an individual’s learning in addition to the more formal experiences provided by educational institutions and work-based settings. Volunteering is seen as offering unique opportunities and settings for learning to take place. Benefits volunteers themselves	Considerable policy interest in the skills that can be developed through involvement	Volunteering reduced to a means, rather than a valued end in itself	Russell (2005); Hill (2009); Low et al (2007); Kitchen (2009); Ockenden (2007)

Table 3. 1: Typology of lenses through which volunteering is studied (adapted from Paine et al 2010: 25-31)

The tendency to describe volunteering in terms of its similarities and differences to these broader social phenomena such as employment, leisure or family-centred obligations has resulted in a number of binary oppositions within the literature (McAllum 2014). Emerging out of broader debates on the relationship between work and leisure (Wilensky 1960,1961; Parker 1971; Rousseau 1978; Zuzanek and Mannell 1983), a prominent focus of sociological research has examined how volunteering fits between the two. These two seemingly incompatible conceptualisations figure prominently in the modern debate on the nature of volunteering and scholarly opinion remains divided. The multiplicity of approaches reflects a general lack of consensus on exactly what a theory of volunteering should be.

The second issue within the literature relates to the one-dimensional approach that scholars often take to volunteering research which means that the term ‘volunteer’ is often applied in a generic and monolithic way to a broad range of voluntary activities; suggesting that citizens engage in the same activities, for the same reasons and cognate outcomes (Cnaan et al 1996; Handy et al 2000). This approach emerges from the tendency of scholars to conceptualise volunteering “as a single phenomenon which ignores the specific occupational and sectoral contexts within which volunteers operate” (Overgaard 2019: 130). By aggregating such a vast array of activities into a single volunteering concept, widespread homogeneity is erroneously assumed and implied within the research. Furthermore, this grouping together of all voluntary activities ignores the great diversity of volunteers, voluntary organisations and causes that exist.

In her problematisation of the way that volunteering is conceptualised, theorised, and studied, Overgaard (2019:130) questions what “care work, soccer coaching, firefighting, conservation work, union activism, and volun-tourism” have in common that renders them similar. Certainly, individuals who perform these various activities would legitimately be labelled volunteers by most published definitions, however, each performs significantly distinct tasks. She observes that current depictions present volunteering as “one form of activity, not many forms” where the basic act of volunteering is the organising theme which, consequently, inhibits a logic that starts with the *kinds* of activity being carried out (Overgaard 2019). The reluctance of scholars to recognise and report on the sector’s inherent diversity is a stark deviation from how paid work is studied. Overgaard (2019) comments that literature that is concerned with paid work is routinely studied within its own boundaries, with distinctions made between and within sectors. For example, research on health care is distinguished from other sectors such as manufacturing. Moreover, within healthcare, distinctions are made between different occupations and professions such as nurses and social

workers. Similarly, Handy et al (2000) comment that within paid employment studies, classifications are based on the type of employee group e.g., managers, administrators or cleaners. Corroborating these concerns, Handy et al (2000:46) states: “unfortunately, the literature on volunteers does not differentiate between the volunteer who sits on the board of the orchestra, the one who delivers meals-on-wheels, and the one who organizes a ski trip”.

The final issue that has contributed to the ambiguity of the conceptual meaning of volunteering relates to the fact that it is seldom explored in qualitative research. Definitions of volunteering are often based on theoretical analysis or quantitative research testing theoretically generated hypotheses and external definitions (Almond and Kendall 2000; Handy et al 2000; Meijs et al 2003). Najam (2000:377) asserts that the field suffers from “definitional impoverishment” and many others have acknowledged the conceptual ambiguity that permeates the literature (see: Cnaan et al 1996; Handy et al 2000; Taylor 2004; Vincent and Harrow 2005; Musick and Wilson 2008; McAllum 2014). Moreover, Brandsen and Pestoff (2006: 494) caution that the unhelpful abundance of generalisations risk being “crippling to debates in third-sector research”.

This chapter has commenced with an exploration of the ‘meaning’ of volunteering in a conceptual or cognitive sense. In examining the various ways in which meaning has been ascribed to the activity of volunteering, several issues within the literature have been highlighted. Undoubtedly, conceptual clarity is needed, as demonstrated by the recent calls for a multi-dimensional approach to volunteering that explores the broader social and institutional contexts within which voluntary work is situated (Haski-Leventhal 2009; Hustinx et al 2010; Wilson 2012). In the following section of this review, a compelling case is presented for volunteering to be conceptualised as ‘work’ since this reflects the changing nature of volunteering against the backdrop of austerity and precarity (presented in chapter two). Moreover, most definitions of volunteering now include a reference to work, particularly within organisation studies (albeit in an undefined and unspecified manner).

3.3 Volunteering as ‘work’

Despite the frequent references to ‘work’ in the study of volunteering, the activity is not treated as ‘work’ in the traditional sense and theorisations of work are mostly absent from the study of volunteering. Similarly, the concept of the ‘volunteer’ is also missing from studies of work. This concern has best been articulated in Overgaard’s (2019: 129) assertion that “while all researchers of volunteering are apt to recognize the unpaid nature of volunteering, they are

much less apt to recognize that volunteering is the unpaid opposite of paid labor”. In other words, there is a preoccupation within extant literature to focus on the ‘unpaid’ component of this conceptualisation at the expense of the ‘work/labour’ element. The latter of which, would provide valuable insights into: the types of activity being undertaken by volunteers; the experiences of volunteers and the types of activities that need support, recognition or regulation by the state (Keleman et al 2017).

Despite recent recognition of the links and similarities between paid and unpaid work, research is largely undertaken separately, following different logics and theoretical underpinnings (Overgaard 2019). In treating paid and unpaid work separately, research ignores the fact that volunteers operate in the same spaces, domains and sectors as employees. The conceptual shift towards (partly) recognising volunteering as a form of unpaid work has occurred against a backdrop of increasing interest in the links between paid and unpaid work (Wilson and Musick 1997; Erlinghagen and Hank 2006; Hank and Stuck 2008 Di Gessa and Grundy 2017). Somewhat similar debates have been had in feminist literature since the 1970s, most prominently through the seminal work of Ann Oakley which has been immensely influential in shaping contemporary British sociological perceptions of housework and women's economic roles. According to Oakley (1974), the labour of the housewife bore many similarities to the industrial worker such as monotony, repetition, fragmentation and excessive speed. This boring and monotonous work, she argued, is undertaken by isolated dependent women in the privacy of their homes, separated from their peers in comparable positions. The work of the housewife involves long hours and is compared unfavourably with low paid and low-status industrial work because it lacks pay and the defined obligations and hours of work characteristic of such jobs. Somewhat comparable is Overgaard's (2015) findings from an Australian hospice. She observed the similarity of paid and unpaid work, recognising that volunteers often participated in, and closely mirrored, the paid worker's moves. She states: “when the nurse washed the left side of the patient, the volunteer washed the right... it would seem impossible to make claims that one is working and the other not”. Such findings have led to calls for research to extend the boundaries of work to, more effectively, account for volunteering (Taylor 2004; Kelemen et al 2017; Overgaard 2019). Taylor (2004) argues that volunteering, although unremunerated, is just like paid work, embedded in and defined by the social relations within which it is located (O'Toole and Grey 2016).

To develop a theory of volunteering, studies of paid and unpaid work must systematically link to one another; this would allow research to begin with the *types* of work

a person does before moving onto the question of whether such work is paid or unpaid. In this proposed logic, unpaid care work would be researched in relation to other forms of care work, rather than being compared with other forms of volunteering. This is the logic in paid work studies which is routinely examined within its own boundaries. Viewing volunteering in this way would help shift the policy focus away from volunteering outcomes to the context within which volunteer work takes place and again, would call attention to the types of activities that need support, recognition or regulation by the state (Keleman et al 2017).

3.3.1 Crisis volunteers

If, as Overgaard (2019) suggests, voluntary work is the unpaid opposite of paid labour, we must consider exactly what it is about (some kinds) of volunteering that denotes it a form of labour. Commenting on the similarity between the work of paid employees and unpaid volunteers, Lewig et al (2007: 430) observe that in many cases, volunteer work is “just as complex, responsible, intrinsically important, challenging and stressful” as paid work. This indicates that the *nature* of (some) volunteering and the working environment are comparable to that found in a paid work context. This observation, coupled with Overgaard’s (2019) assertion that volunteers operate in the same spaces, domains, and sectors as paid employees, provide a compelling argument for understanding volunteering as a form of labour.

By conceptualising unpaid voluntary work in this way, Lewig et al (2007) highlight a significant, yet under-theorised, aspect of voluntary work. That is, voluntary work, just like paid work, can be highly stressful and challenging. Only a very limited number of specialist volunteering scholars report on the experiences of volunteers working in such environments (Sundram 2018). For example, Hellman and House (2006) note, despite increasing theoretical and empirical attention to volunteering in general, there is limited understanding of the attitudes, behaviours and experiences where volunteering occurs in high-stress environments. This is surprising given the broad range of services that volunteers are involved in. For example, services delivered by volunteers include rape counselling (McMillan 2004; Rath 2008); emergency response (Kissane 2010; O’meara et al 2012; Huynh et al 2014); substance-abuse counselling (Hunot and Rosenbach 1998; Martin et al 2008); psychiatric support (Dotan and Mester 1996; Gilat et al 2012; Klug et al 2018); bereavement services (Cohen and Keats 2015; Coyne 2017) and self-harm and suicide services (Sundram et al 2018; Willems et al 2020). Other high-stress environments for volunteers include working in hospices (Glass and Hastings 1992; Brown 2011; Field-Richards and Arthur

2012); hospitals (Liao-Troth 2001; O'Donohue and Nelson 2009) and disaster areas (Webber and Jones 2011). Due to low levels of funding, the delivery of these services is frequently provided by (or at least supported by) volunteers (Saxena et al 2007; Kissane 2010; O'meara et al 2012; Thomas et al 2017).

Volunteers supporting these services are typically referred to in the literature as 'crisis volunteers' and their most common vehicle of service delivery are crisis hotlines (Aguirre and Bolton 2013). Many have acknowledged that crisis hotlines are a highly stressful and challenging environment to work in (see: Gould et al 2007; Kalafat et al 2007; Mishara et al 2007; Willems et al 2020). For example, Willems et al (2020) observe that volunteers within crisis lines are frequently exposed to distressed individuals who are experiencing intense suffering. They go on to recognise the arduous nature of the work that requires volunteers to continuously switch between a wide range of intrusive and complex topics, such as loneliness, insomnia, suicidal thoughts and abusive experiences. A key feature of the crisis support model, therefore, is empathic engagement (Lambert and Barley 2002; Cozolino 2006). However, the experiences and effects on crisis volunteers of this frequent empathic engagement with distressed others is often overlooked in the literature in favour of the effects on paid workers in registered 'professional' roles (Kitchingman et al 2018). Rather, the experiences of volunteers working in these environments are ignored altogether. Areas of research interest within this specialist field have focused on characterising callers and the needs of callers (Coman et al 2001; Coveney 2012; Spittal et al 2015); training volunteer counsellors (Rath 2008); the interpersonal values and personality traits of volunteer counsellors (Rek and Dinger 2016) and the effectiveness of volunteers as counsellors compared to paid professional counsellors (den Boer et al 2005; Mishara et al 2016).

While a comprehensive theoretical and empirical knowledge base pertaining to volunteers' experiences in crisis settings is lacking, a small number of studies could be located. One line of inquiry is concerned with the negative effects of volunteering such as: elevated symptoms of anxiety and depression; symptoms of burnout; secondary traumatic stress and compassion fatigue. Interestingly, the term burnout was initially used to describe a specific kind of occupational exhaustion in young highly committed volunteers working in a free health care clinic (Freudenberger 1974). The concept of burnout has since been almost exclusively adopted by the paid work literature. Burnout comprises three primary components: (1) exhaustion, which refers to the depletion of emotional resources and is characterised by mental, emotional and physical tiredness; (2) cynicism, which describes the development of impersonal, unsympathetic attitudes toward the recipients of one's services

and (3) feelings of low personal accomplishment (Maslach and Jackson 1981). While some studies continued to demonstrate the existence of burnout among volunteers (see: Ferrari et al 1999; Ross et al 1999; Snyder et al 1999; Argentero et al 2006), the rate at which this body of work developed was much slower than that within the paid work context. Activities that induce higher levels of burnout include those requiring frequent contact with users, who typically, are ill or are suffering from serious social problems, and who therefore, require great physical and emotional effort (Moreno-Jimenez et al 2010). This indicates the importance of developing understandings of burnout among those volunteers engaged in crisis line work.

Upon noting the paucity of empirical research on burnout amongst volunteer counsellors in comparison to ‘professional’ counsellors, Capner and Caltabiano (1993) compared the progression to burnout among each group. They concluded that while there were job stressors unique to both ‘professional’ and ‘volunteer’ counsellors, there was overwhelming evidence that they belonged to a single, homogeneous counselling population. This supports Overgaard’s (2019) call for studies of paid and unpaid work to be linked more closely to each other. In a more recent study, Sundram et al (2018) explored the positive and negative experiences of volunteer mental health telephone counsellors. They found that the difficulty of the role including personal issues ‘coming up’ while on calls, had the potential to affect volunteers emotionally and mentally. Other studies have found that the required anonymity within crisis line contexts prevents volunteers from knowing the outcome of their contact, which in turn, can contribute to burnout (Cyr and Dowrick 1991; Pollock et al 2012). Other studies concerned with the experiences of crisis volunteers have explored secondary traumatic stress (Phipps et al 2007). Herein, is the idea that individuals can experience the symptoms of post-traumatic stress without being directly involved in a traumatic incident. The term secondary traumatic stress (STS) has been used to describe the stress reaction that can occur as a result of having gained explicit knowledge of a traumatic or distressing event (Lerias and Byrne 2003). In a recent systematic review, Willems et al (2020)⁸ examined the mental wellbeing of crisis line volunteers and the factors associated with it. In the thirteen published empirical studies they found, indications were that crisis line volunteers were at increased risk of declined mental wellbeing.

⁸ Willems et al. (2020) located only thirteen studies between 1973 and 2018 that examined the mental wellbeing of crisis line volunteers and the factors associated with it. These studies consisted of eight quantitative surveys and five qualitative studies.

In the few studies reviewed above, a light is shone upon the hard work, skill and effort that is required of volunteers to carry out this type of voluntary work and thus, supports calls for this non-economic activity to be integrated into the sociology of work. For effective integration of paid and unpaid work, understandings of volunteers' experiences are necessary. The above discussion has demonstrated the importance of reporting the experiences and impacts of volunteering because, negative experiences especially, may result in a decline in the mental wellbeing of volunteers which in turn can lead to: poorer quality of care; higher absenteeism and higher turnover rates (Johnson et al 2018; Willems et al 2020).

The remainder of this review chapter examines the literature concerned with the existential meaning of volunteering, that is, the value and significance that volunteers attach to their activity. In particular, concepts of purpose, meaningfulness and identity are examined. Where cognitive meaning implies a theoretical description of reality, existential meaning concerns the subjective experience of what it means to be a human being and what one considers valuable in life (Herman 1998; von Essen 2016). The question of existential meaning is an interesting phenomenon for scholars investigating volunteering because, as an uncommodified form of work that is freely undertaken without financial payment, it helps to answer the question, 'Why am I here?' (Pratt and Ashforth 2003). A deeper understanding of the existential meaning can, therefore, help to theorise understandings of volunteer commitment and retention thereby contributing to the empirical gap that has been noted elsewhere (Brudney and Meijjs 2009; Vecina et al 2012).

3.4 Existential meaning of volunteering

This section of the review will build upon the preceding discussion concerned with the cognitive meaning of volunteering by unpacking another level of meaning, that is, the existential meaning of volunteering. At an individual level of analysis, 'meaning' is "the output of having made sense of something, or what it signifies", the review before now has focussed on meaning in this sense. Meaningfulness, which is addressed in this part of the review, is a related but distinct concept concerned with "the amount of significance" one attaches to a target or subject (Rosso et al 2010: 94; Pratt and Ashforth 2003). Put another way, 'meaning' is a *description* of how one understands what something means, whereas meaningfulness is a specific type of *evaluation* or experience (Martela and Steger 2016: 536). This section of the review will shine a light upon the importance of the existential meaning of volunteering to advance understanding of the true depth of volunteers' experiences.

Within extant literature, volunteering is often described as a significant source of purpose, belonging and identity (Rodell 2013; O'Toole and Grey 2016), which in turn, increases the sense of meaningfulness of one's life. In other words, there is a close link between roles (what am I doing here?), membership (where do I belong?), identity (who am I?) and meaningfulness (why am I here?). Taking as a starting point that meaningfulness is based on an appraisal of one's life as coherent, significant, directed, and belonging as proposed by Schnell (2009), volunteering provides plentiful opportunities to fulfil these characteristics. Specifically, Schnell and Hoof (2012: 38) comment that volunteering "enables experiences of *significance* by taking responsibility for people in need; it furthers *directedness* by providing clear goals, and it is usually connected with becoming a member of a community, thus supporting *belonging*". Similarly, others have observed that in the human quest for meaning, many seek various volunteer opportunities (Pratt and Ashforth 2003; Spreitzer 1995). Some have investigated how personal values and social relationships affect the experienced meaningfulness of voluntary work (Baines 2004; Venter et al 2017; Ward and Greene 2018) while others posit that strong bonding and socialisation enhances one's sense of meaning and commitment to their volunteering groups and tasks (Haski-Leventhal and Cnaan 2009; Hustinx et al 2008).

Although there is a lack of research that empirically investigates the existential meaning of volunteering, one significant exception is Note and Daele's (2016) recent empirical study which reveals an aspect of meaningfulness, that before now, has not been commented on in the literature, that is, the link between 'being moved' and its relation to meaningfulness. In their phenomenological analysis, volunteers reflected on their lived experiences of being moved as a result of their interactions with service users. Volunteers in the study consisted of victim-offender mediators, telephone counsellors at a suicide line, and 'informal' carers working in palliative care and psychiatric settings. Note and Daele (2016) found that volunteers' experiences provided meaning in their lives and thus contributed significantly to their sense of meaningfulness. Their study developed the notion of 'wit(h)nessing' to capture the experiences of volunteers who felt deeply linked and connected to the worlds of complete strangers. They found that, through the intimacy (and close proximity) of the volunteer-user interaction, volunteers not only 'witnessed' what was going on in the lives of these strangers, but they felt that they were there *with them*, experiencing their feelings alongside them.

To develop understanding of the ways that volunteering can provide a sense of meaningfulness for those who engage, it is useful to consider how volunteers come to be

psychologically and affectively attached to their organisations and the work they carry out. This sense of ‘attachment’ has been a major focus in organisational behaviour research that seeks to understand how paid employees feel about their organisations. Scholars who have sought to advance understanding of this relationship write from three main perspectives that can be drawn on to achieve a better understanding of voluntary work. They include organisational commitment, organisational identification and psychological ownership. Each of these perspectives will be reviewed in this final part of the chapter, drawing, wherever possible, from empirical research which focuses explicitly on volunteers and the experience of volunteering. Addressing these different forms of attachment will broaden understanding and provide insights into the volunteer experience and the factors that contribute to their sustained commitment.

3.5 Volunteer commitment

Employee commitment is an important concept in organisational psychology since it is a strong predictor of turnover amongst paid workers (Meyer et al 2002; Gilbert et al 2017). The presence of this relationship between volunteers and organisations is yet to be fully understood (Guinevere et al 2017). Within extant literature, volunteer motivation is often conflated and confounded with volunteer commitment. The distinction between motivation and commitment is an important one, as acknowledged almost three decades ago by Pearce (1993) who observed that the factors that contribute toward the maintenance of commitment over time may not be the same as those that initially favour a decision to join a voluntary organisation. Similar observations are reflected in more recent work by Romaioli et al (2016: 718) who comment: “it is erroneous to suppose that if a person has an initial altruistic motivation that facilitates their decision to volunteer, this will remain the same over time and will suffice to justify continuing commitment”.

According to Meyer et al (2006), commitment is a force that connects an individual to a target, and to a course of action that is pertinent to the target. This definition has at least two important implications for the present study. First, it recognises that individuals become committed to various foci such as organisations, colleagues, beneficiaries and goals. Second, the definition reflects that an individual’s bond with a target commits the person to behaviours that are relevant to that target. Emphasising the value of distinguishing between multiple foci (Morin et al 2011), Becker and Billings (1993: 177) identify four employee profiles with distinct commitment foci: (a) those who are locally committed to their

supervisor or workgroup, (b) globally committed to top management and the wider organisation, (c) committed to both the local and global elements of the organisation and (d) demonstrating no commitment at all. Relatedly, Wilson (2000) cautions that a distinction should be made between commitment to the volunteer role and commitment to the volunteer organisation. Multiple foci of commitment among volunteers has largely been neglected in the volunteering literature. A notable exception is a study by Valeau et al (2013) whose work investigates volunteers' turnover intentions through the lens of organisational commitment theory. Their study finds that forms and targets of commitment can combine to better explain volunteer turnover. They apply Meyer and Allen's (1991) model of commitment, known as the three-component model (TCM), to the voluntary context. The TCM comprises three components that reflect different types of commitment and attachment, they include: affective, normative and continuance commitment (see table below 3.2). This conceptualisation of commitment has emerged as a dominant, effective and robust approach which views commitment as a multi-dimensional concept (Meyer et al 2002).

The relevance of the three-component model of commitment has been variously applied (Dawley et al 2005) contested (Boezeman and Ellemers 2007) and expanded upon in the volunteer context (Park and Kim 2013). The three commitment components (affective, normative, and continuance) have been shown to have varying degrees of relevance for the volunteer experience (Bang et al 2012; Dawley et al 2005). Normative and continuance commitment in particular have been widely questioned (Bang et al 2012; Stride and Higgs 2013). Affective commitment, however, has been shown to be particularly appropriate and useful for understanding volunteer commitment (Bang et al 2012; Stride and Higgs 2013; Gatignon-Turnau and Mignonac 2015); justified through its arguably higher salience to the voluntary sector than normative, and continuance commitment types (Dawley et al 2005; Stride and Higgs 2013) and its stronger empirical underpinning (Meyer and Allen 1997; Stride and Higgs 2013; Hager 2014; Gatignon-Turnau and Mignonac 2015).

Type of commitment	Concept Definition	Implications/ limitations	Application to VS
Affective	<p>Refers to an individual's psychological bond with the organisation. An affective attachment to, and identification with, the organisation's values and goals. Reflects the degree to which members 'want' to be involved in the organisation (Stephens et al 2004).</p> <p>Variables associated with enhanced AC include: Job challenge, autonomy, variety of skills used, role clarity, decision making, workplace relations and fulfilling experiences and self confidence in one's own abilities (Valeau et al 2013).</p>	Affective committed is erroneously assumed to be inherently 'good' insofar as it increases members' contributions. Recent studies indicate that there might be an overlooked 'dark side' (Studer and von Schnurbein 2013; O'Toole and Grey 2016; Ward and Greene 2018).	The focus of 'emotional attachment' between individual and organisation has been shown to be particularly appropriate for the voluntary sector, and specifically useful in understanding commitment amongst volunteers (Bang et al 2012; Gatignon-Turnau and Mignonac 2015; Stride and Higgs 2013).
Normative	<p>Involves a sense of loyalty based on perceived obligation to stay with the organisation.</p> <p>Where normative commitment is high, one may feel that it is immoral to leave the organisation because its mission is seen to be very worthy.</p>	Sometimes dismissed as redundant insofar as it bears many similarities to affective commitment and does not explain work behaviours beyond the other components (Meyer and Parfyonova 2010: 283).	Has been shown to be broadly explained through volunteers' levels of affective commitment e.g., situations that produce affective commitment are also likely to increase an individual's sense of obligation to the organisation (Bang et al 2012; Meyer and Allen 1991; Stride and Higgs 2013). This negates the need for an independent measure of normative commitment.
Continuance	Involves a sense of attachment based on the costs associated with leaving. Causes of continuance commitment are perceived to be outside of the employee's control such as the losses associated with leaving, or the lack of alternatives.	Continuance commitment refers to instrumental ties between the individual and the organisation. Thus, guided by a personal cost-benefit analysis.	Research suggests that this dimension holds less pertinence and utility for evaluating commitment amongst volunteers because tangible benefits such as wages and pensions are not available ((Dawley et al 2005; Bang et al 2012; Stride and Higgs 2013; Liao-Troth 2001; Stephens et al 2004).

Table 3. 2: Definitions of the three forms of commitment measured in the TCM

Affective commitment is defined as an individual's "emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization" (Meyer and Allen 1991: 67). Individuals with strong affective commitment, therefore, will likely continue their organisational membership because they 'want' to do so (Meyer and Allen 1991; Stephens et al 2004). Affective commitment can occur as a result of structural, personal and work experience characteristics (Meyer and Allen 1991; Dunham et al 1994; Domínguez-Falcón et al 2016). Noteworthy, the experiences that occur during an individual's tenure with an organisation are influential in the development and continuity of psychological attachment (Mowday et al 1982). Thus, volunteer commitment is "an evolving process that begins with expectations and that is carried forward by the nature of experiences that are obtained along the way" (Green and Chalip 2004: 52). Investigating the established and emergent antecedents of affective commitment among volunteers in a large Australian voluntary organisation, McCormick and Donohue (2019) found that affective commitment was positively predicted by role scope, personal importance, perceived organisational support, esteem-based need satisfaction and value-based need satisfaction and negatively predicted by role ambiguity. Similarly, Pajo and Lee (2011) identified that enhanced perceptions of task significance and meaningfulness contributed to the sustained involvement of corporate volunteers. These findings highlight the important and central role of the volunteer experience for understanding commitment; there is an evident need for volunteer managers to embed experience-enhancing elements into their volunteers' service to help sustain longer-term involvement (Vecina et al 2012).

3.5.1 The dark side of volunteer commitment

Haski-Leventhal and Bargal's (2008) study of volunteers working with at-risk youth note that at some point in a volunteer's tenure with an organisation, they develop a "deep emotional involvement" toward those they are tasked with helping, other volunteers, and the organisation itself. This involvement is often expressed using the word "love" to describe the way they feel about aspects of the volunteering experience. Intuitively, one would assume that such affectively committed volunteers are a good thing for voluntary organisations because high levels of commitment generally increase the contributions that volunteers make (O'Toole and Greys 2016). Ward and Greene (2018: 1172) agree that "such passionate commitment is difficult to conceptualize as bad". However, some research has indicated that there might be an overlooked 'dark side' to affectively committed volunteers (Studer and von

Schnurbein 2013; O'Toole and Grey 2016; Ward and Greene 2018). In their qualitative study of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI), O'Toole and Grey (2016) found that although volunteers' commitment was indisputable, this did not translate into being easy to manage. In fact, their strong commitment to the RNLI made them challenging to manage. O'Toole and Grey's (2016) study found that volunteers engaged in contestation and resistance around institutional mandates. This led O'Toole and Grey (2016: 69) to call for research that explores whether "for managers of voluntary organizations, can too much commitment be a bad thing?" In response to this question, Ward and Greene (2018) adopt an emotions lens in their research and challenge the dominant rhetoric in practitioner and academic literature that perpetuates an overly positive view of volunteer involvement. In their qualitative study of the National Trust, where volunteers are affectively committed to the spaces and places in which they volunteer, Ward and Greene (2018: 1171) found that managers often feel that they have very little control over how the volunteer contribution is executed and find themselves caught in a paradox of dependency and a lack of control where managers are often paralysed by the perceived collective power of volunteers.

If, as has been indicated, there is a risk that volunteers may become 'too committed' to their organisations, a logical next step in this review is to uncover how and why such commitment emerges. Here, it is useful to examine the role of identity among volunteers. As observed by Pratt and Ashforth (2003), meaningfulness (the "why am I here" question) is intricately intertwined and often preceded by the construction of an identity (the "who am I" question). Such observations suggest that meaning and identity stand in a dialectical relationship. The interrelation between these two concepts has been confirmed in broader management and organisation studies over the last three decades (Gray et al 1985; Albert and Whetten 1985; Dutton et al 1994; Weick 1995; Golden-Biddle and Rao 1997; Glynn 2000; Brown 2006; Schultz and Hernes 2013).

3.6 Identity and identification

A second way of understanding the psychological relationship between an individual and the organisation of which they are a member, is through social identification processes (Hogg and Terry 2000; Haslam 2001; Riketta 2005; van Dick 2004). Identities are the sets of meanings that people use to define themselves as: unique individuals (person identities), role occupants (role identities) or group members (social identities) (Stets 2006). Together, these dimensions of identity (person, role and social) form the bases of a person's overarching identity (Burke

and Stets 2009). Firstly, one's personal identity is the sum of one's unique characteristics and idiosyncratic attributes that distinguish one individual from another, the 'I'. One's personal identity is not directly tied to others in the social structure and thus, are conceived as stable entities within the overall self-concept and are relatively enduring and constant (Carter and Marony 2018). Secondly, role identity represents one's imaginative view of oneself as an occupant of a social role (McCall and Simmons 1978). Role identities emerge from one's relative status positions in the social structure and are linked to others' expectations (Stryker and Burke 2000). Role identities are less stable than personal identities and are, therefore, more likely to change across the life course. Finally, one's social identity stems from an individual's identification or membership with a social group, the 'we'. Social identities represent an individual's knowledge that they belong to certain groups, coupled with some emotional and value significance regarding that group membership (Hogg et al 2004).

3.6.1 Volunteer role-identities

Role-identities are components of the self that correspond to the social roles we play (Grube and Piliavin 2000) and thus, are an important source of self-identity (van Ingen and Wilson 2017). Enacting social roles provides a basis for understanding the self as a meaningful social object (McCall and Simmons 1978; Stryker 1980; Stryker and Statham 1985). Van Dyne and Farmer (2005) state that, through undertaking an activity such as volunteering, individuals may incorporate the activity into their self-concept and thus, form a role-identity. Research that combines volunteering with the concept of role-identity has deepened understandings of the individual, dynamic and reflexive nature of volunteering (Gronlund 2011). As all people perform a number of roles, their self (or personal) identity is composed of identities based on more than one role, as well as identities drawn from other sources, such as gender, age or ethnicity (Stets and Burke 2005).

An important theoretical problem is that individuals have multiple, and sometimes competing, role-identities (e.g., "I am a daughter, sister, aunt, journalist, and volunteer"). Most theorists assume that some role-identities are more salient for individuals' self-conceptions than others (McCall and Simmons 1978; Rosenberg 1979; Stryker 1980; Weigert et al 1986; Thoits 1992). Role theory predicts that the other roles a person is engaged in determines how strongly a person identifies with their volunteer role (van Ingen and Wilson 2017). This has raised questions about how a person's many identities are ordered and structured. The degree to which a person identifies with a role has been referred to as variation in the 'salience' of the

role (Thoits 2012). Role salience refers to: a) the subjective importance or value that individuals attach to a role which is accepted as self-defining and b) the ranking given to the role identity in relation to other identities (Thoits 2013). Variation in the “salience” of the volunteer role has seldom been investigated. In this respect, not all volunteers are alike when it comes to what their role means to them. Some regard their volunteer work as a very important part of their lives insofar as it is so central to their self-perception that it virtually defines who they are. For others, volunteering might be more of a temporary or pastime activity that is done for enjoyment. In the case of the latter, volunteer work may not be all that relevant to an individual’s sense of self and is thus, not a reflection of who or what they are (Thoits 2013: 11). For these volunteers, their sense of self would remain intact even if they ceased volunteering (Gronlund 2011:6).

van Ingen and Wilson (2017) note that most explanations of variation in the strength of volunteer role identity have focused on proximal factors such as, years of experience as a volunteer; time spent volunteering; training for the volunteer role; expressions of gratitude for volunteering; positive interactions with other volunteers, clients, and staff; and level of satisfaction with volunteer work, belief in the importance of volunteering and the causes for which the volunteer work is performed (Grube and Piliavin 2000; Finkelstein et al 2005; Marta et al 2014; Guntert and Wehner 2015). While these studies have added much to the understanding of volunteer role identity, they push to the background more distal, but equally important factors, such as the *type* of volunteering that people are engaged with, and their personal connections and affiliations to such.

3.6.2 Volunteer personal identity

Despite work in the social identity tradition highlighting the importance of both personal and social identities for action (Postmes and Jetten 2006), Stets and Burke (2000) comment that neither identity theorists nor social identity theorists, engage personal identity directly nor incorporate it prominently into their theories. Instead, the starting point of most volunteering research views volunteering as something that people do in groups and within organisations. This had led to an unbalanced focus on the importance of understanding group processes at the expense of individual ones (Simon et al 2000; Boezeman and Ellemers 2010).

A limited number of scholars have acknowledged the potential for personal identity to contribute to volunteering literature, particularly by considering the role of values (see: Hitlin 2007; Gronlund 2011). When referring to a person’s values, we are examining where they

stand on various moral questions that imbue social life. Values are the core of one's personal identity since they refer to variably important goals that transcend situations and act as guiding principles for people's decisions and behaviours (Hitlin 2007). Freely chosen actions, such as volunteering, provide insights into the type of person someone is (Weinstein and Ryan 2010). Many individuals decide to volunteer to fulfil a range of different needs and goals which often, are personal and related to an individual's life situation as well as their values (Omoto and Snyder 1995; Clary et al 1998; Yeung 2004). Moreover, the specific *type* of voluntary work that people choose to engage in, is largely influenced by their personal values (Kearney 2001). As Dekker and Halman (2003:6) observe "values can manifest themselves in motivations to volunteer because people are guided by values, norms, and belief systems". Put differently, values serve as anchors for experiences of authenticity and represent an assessment of the extent to which volunteers fulfil the ideal visions they have of themselves (Hitlin 2007).

Values of altruism; solidarity; reciprocity; beneficence; injustice, religion and inequality are frequently mentioned in connection with voluntary work (Bekkers 2005; Musick and Wilson 2008; Handy et al 2010). Although values are a common field of study in relation to volunteering and identity, they are rarely linked systematically with the self, thus, further isolating personal identity from social identity. Hitlin (2007: 519) claims that the "concept of personal identity becomes the anchor for a synthesis of self and values". Gronlund (2011) depicts the various ways individual volunteers experience and associate volunteering with their personal identities, she concluded that values provide an empirical window into the core of personal identity. Nevertheless, her results led her to call for further research on volunteering, values, and identities, alone and in combination.

3.6.3 Organisational identification

Organisational identification is an emergent process of identity formation (Ashforth et al 2008; Scott et al 1998) that reflects the psychological merging of self and organisation (Tyler and Blader 2000; van Knippenberg 2000). In other words, Organisational Identification (OID) contributes to the individuals' definition of who they are. However, there is no single, universally accepted definition of OID (Brown 2017) and the lack of clear distinction between identity and identification has been noted by Miscenko and Day (2015) who observe that theorists tend to treat the constructs as synonyms. Offering some conceptual clarity, Miscenko and Day (2015) propose that identity refers to the meaning of a particular entity

(i.e., role, organisation) that is internalised as part of the self-concept whereas identification refers to the cognitive, psychological and emotional attachment that an individual makes to a role, team, organisation or other entity.

In their narrowest definitions, Ashforth et al (2008) acknowledge that organisational identification is merely construed cognitively where it is referred to as "...the perception of oneness or belongingness to some human aggregate" (Ashforth and Mael 1989: 21). Less restricted definitions suggest that identification refers to the extent to which an organisation defines the self and the individual's view of the world. Moreover, identification involves an evaluation of the meaning of organisational membership in which values and emotions figure (Brown 2017). These broader conceptions emphasise that organisational identification means accepting a range of collective goals, beliefs and values, stereotypic traits, behaviours, knowledge and skills 'as one's own' (Ashforth et al. 2008: 330) and embodying them to become prototypical of it (Tajfel and Turner 1979; Elsbach 2004). Ashforth (2016: 362) postulates that identification "is the means through which the individual becomes a microcosm of the organization (or whatever the entity). The organization takes root in the hearts and minds of those who identify with it, enabling them to enact its purpose, values, beliefs, and so on" (Ashforth 2016: 362).

The aforementioned 'affective organisational commitment' bears similarities to Organisational Identification (OID) insofar as both refer to the internalisation and incorporation of organisational values, norms and goals into one's self-concept. This has resulted in some overlap in the use of these two constructs (Stinglhamber et al 2015). Despite conceptual similarity (Gautam et al 2004; Bergami and Bagozzi 2000) they are theoretically (Ashforth and Mael 1989; Meyer et al 2006) and empirically distinct (Gautam et al 2004; van Knippenberg and Sleebos 2006). Importantly, both constructs have the potential to provide valuable insights into the ways that volunteers become psychologically and affectively attached to their organisations and their voluntary work. The difference between the two concepts, as pointed out by van Knippenberg and Sleebos (2006), is the degree of self-reference to the organisation. Whereas identification is a cognitive, perceptual construct reflecting the extent to which the organisation is incorporated into the self-concept, commitment is more typically viewed as an attitude toward the organisation and in the quality of the individual-organisation exchange (Pratt 1998). In other words, self-definition is central to understanding organisational identification whereas social exchange is central to understanding organisational commitment. Commenting on the similarity, Ashforth et al (2008) conclude that more efforts should be put into integrating commitment and

identification to make progress in this line of research. Writing later, Ashforth (2016: 362) comments on the indiscriminate application of identification, noting: “identification is often dropped unreflectively into studies as if it were an attitudinal variable akin to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, or intent to turn over”. According to Ashforth et al (2008: 359), identification is a “compelling construct” because it not only “roots the individual in the organization” but “reflects a fundamental and visceral connection that other attachment constructs lack”. This sense of “visceral unity” or oneness is what makes it distinct from commitment (Ashforth et al 2016: 32).

3.6.3.1 Organisational identification among volunteers

In her review of research on organisational identification, O’Toole (2013: 55) acknowledges that organisational identification has predominantly been examined in the context of paid employees, reflected in her observation that “almost no studies have been carried out on this topic within the voluntary sector, which is surprising due to the importance of person-organization fit within voluntary organizations”. Similarly, Traeger and Alfes (2019) note that identity theory has, so far, neglected the specific characteristics of the volunteering context. A limited number of studies, however, have contributed to this empirical gap (Boezeman and Ellemers 2014; Traeger and Alfes 2019). Firstly, Boezeman and Ellemers (2014) argue that in order to encourage identification, voluntary sector leaders must instil pride and respect among volunteers by: communicating the effectiveness of volunteer work (e.g., tell members how the organisation improves people’s lives); supporting volunteers (e.g., help volunteers to overcome task-related problems); and encouraging volunteers to express their ideas. Secondly, in their examination of the mechanisms through which combinations of HR practices influence volunteer outcomes, Traeger and Alfes (2019) found that HR practices play a functional and a non-instrumental role, in that they foster volunteers’ psychological empowerment as well as their identification with their voluntary organisation. These findings extend previous studies aimed at understanding how high-performance HR practices relate to positive volunteer outcomes (Cuskelly et al 2006; Gardner et al 2011; Messersmith et al 2011). Their findings show that engagement levels are likely to increase when volunteers are empowered and identify with their organisations.

OID, like other psychological and attachment constructs, have lacked critical engagement. Ashforth (2016: 367) notes “all but a tiny fraction of studies on identification focus on the positive consequences”. He goes on to question an implicit assumption found in

much organisational behaviour research, that is, that if something is good, more of it must be better. While attention has often focused on identification as reflecting a positive connection between the self and organisation, other relationships can have negative outcomes, including dis-identification (an active and negative connection between the self and organisation), schizo-identification (simultaneous identification and disidentification with different aspects of an organisation), neutral identification (a self-perception of impartiality with respect to an organisation), split identification (identification with ‘normative’ aspects and dis-identification with organisational failings) (Elsbach 1999; Gutierrez et al 2010; Lemmergard and Muhr 2012) and overidentification (defined as the instance in which an individual’s “identity subsumes and defines the self, such that, one’s individual identity [and other relational and social identities] is lost” (Galvin et al 2015: 168)). Overidentification can render people “myopic in that it offers only a single perspective” (Ashforth 2016: 367) and has been associated with workaholism (Avanzi et al 2012), unethical behaviours (Leavitt and Sluss 2015), continued commitment to a failing project (Haslam et al 2006), a lack of objectivity in dealing with clients with whom one identifies (Svanberg and Öhman 2015) and resistance to change (Bouchikhi and Kimberly 2003).

The literature presented and synthesised here that pertains to the existential meaning of volunteering has explored how volunteering can provide a sense of purpose, belonging and meaningfulness in the lives of volunteers. In particular, understandings of the ways that volunteers become psychologically and affectively attached to their organisations and their voluntary work have featured. Through an exploration of affective organisational commitment and social identification processes, this review has delineated how some volunteers may regard their volunteer work as a central part of their self-definition. Additionally, this chapter has explored some of the negative implications that may occur as a result of the psychological merging of self and organisation such as, a lack of managerial control and a strong sense of resistance to change. The final section of this chapter concludes with an exploration of how such a strong association between a volunteer’s sense of self and their voluntary organisation can lead to feelings of possessiveness and ownership.

3.7 Psychological ownership

Psychological ownership is experienced when an individual develops possessive feelings over a specific target which may be an object, concept, organisation or other person (Van Dyne and Pierce 2004). Writing about the complexities of ownership, Etzioni (1991: 466)

describes the multiple levels at which ownership is experienced, he argues that ownership is a “dual creation, part attitude, part object, part in the mind, part ‘real’”. Most notable is that an aspect of ownership falls within the realm of the mind wherein a ‘sense’ of ownership emerges, that is, individuals *feel* as though the target of ownership, or a piece of it, belongs to them.

Within an organisational context, individuals exhibit psychological ownership when they are possessive and take ownership of the job they are performing without legally having ties to it. Put simply, the organisation and various organisational factors become the ‘target’ of an individual’s attachment (Pierce et al 2001). Individuals can experience psychological ownership over a variety of targets within an organisational setting. For example, Avey et al (2009) suggest that the ‘target’ may refer to something as small as a preferred seat in the company cafeteria, or as large as the organisation itself. Moreover, the target of ownership may be tangible or intangible and can include a novel idea, a strategic initiative, or a specific project and its implementation (Avey et al 2012; Baer and Brown 2012; Brown et al 2014). Stressing the breadth of targets towards which individuals might feel psychological ownership, Pierce and Jussila (2011) identified 128 distinct ownership targets⁹. Psychological ownership research generally differentiates between two distinct foci of possession in organisational settings (Bernhard and O’Driscoll 2011: 349). They include, organisation-based psychological ownership which refers to one’s sense of ownership towards an organisation and job-based psychological ownership which refers to one’s feelings of ownership towards his or her specific job or role. Dawkins et al (2017) observe that the majority of psychological ownership research conducted to date has focused solely on organisation-based foci.

3.7.1 The emergence of psychological ownership

According to Pierce et al (2001), there are three main antecedents or ‘routes’ through which psychological ownership emerges. The three ways in which organisational members come to feel ownership include: a) controlling the target, b) coming to intimately know the target and c) investing the self in the target. The first route to psychological ownership, ‘control’, refers to one’s perception about the amount of control he or she exercises over an object. When

⁹ Pierce and Jussila’s (2011) 128 distinct ownership targets are subcategorised as material objects, people/relationships, spaces, responsibilities, work outcomes, mental processes, personal attributes, actions/processes, and social systems

perceived levels of control over a target are high, the target tends to become a part of the person's extended self (Belk 1988), which can foster feelings of ownership among the individual (Pierce et al 2001). Factors that enhance an individual's perceived control, include autonomy and perceived power (Pierce et al 2004). Employees with high levels of work autonomy have greater control, independence and discretion over their work, which will likely enhance their psychological ownership. The second route to psychological ownership, 'intimate knowledge', refers to the information and knowledge that an individual possesses about a target. Herein, the link between the individual and the target is strengthened which gives rise to a sense of possession (Rantanen and Jussila 2011), indicating a deep relationship between the self and the object (Pierce et al 2001). Enhanced information and knowledge can be obtained when a member of the organisation has served for a long period of time or when access to valuable information is granted (Zhang et al 2020). Finally, the third route to psychological ownership, 'investment', refers to the extent to which individuals commit themselves to the target (Pierce et al 2001). The investment of self may involve one's time, ideas, effort, skills, and physical, psychological and intellectual energies. Such investments can give rise to feelings of ownership over the work; the products of employees' labour and the equipment they use to perform their roles. Tasks that require individuals to exercise higher discretion, wherein employees invest more of their own ideas, unique knowledge, and personal style will likely result in stronger psychological ownership over the target. In other words, through an individual's investment of energy and labour, they produce products and outcomes which may become representations of the self. In this case, the individual may begin to feel that the target of ownership flows from the self.

3.7.1.1 An empirical gap

Ainsworth (2020) notes "there has been no examination of psychological ownership within the volunteering literature". This omission could hinder the development of knowledge since the construct offers valuable insights into a range of volunteer behaviours which could explain why volunteers develop possessive feelings towards a variety of 'targets'. Studies indicate that ownership is more prevalent amongst objects that align with the individual's self-identity (Pierce et al 2001; Jussila et al 2015). In other words, the reflection of the self in the target is recognised as a pre-cursor in the development of psychological ownership (Pierce et al 2001). In an attempt to contribute to the development of this empirical gap, Ainsworth (2020) takes some initial steps towards developing an understanding of the role

psychological ownership plays amongst volunteers. In his study, he examines the role of psychological ownership as a factor in volunteer retention for predominantly community-based voluntary service organisations by examining how the sense of ownership over the voluntary organisation affects volunteering attitudes and intentions.

3.8 Chapter conclusion

To conclude this literature review, I will provide a visual representation of the volunteer experience (chapter 3) during times of change and uncertainty (chapter 2) via a unique conceptual framework (see figure 3.1). In doing so, the central concepts and theories that have been utilised throughout, come together to capture the interaction between the internal environment (the individual experience of volunteering) and the external environment (the drivers of organisational change). This framework is based on institutional theory and the meaning of volunteering and is an instrument through which to better understand how austerity and the politicisation of the sector affect the volunteer experience.

To understand the complexities of the volunteer-organisation relationship it was necessary to draw on and synthesise the literature concerned with volunteer commitment, identity and ownership. Examining these different forms of attachment broadens understanding of the volunteer experience by shining a light upon the factors that either a) contribute to the sustained commitment of volunteers or b) function as the catalyst for resistance (when volunteers' understandings and experiences of them are disrupted). Specifically, the use of institutional isomorphism in conjunction with the broad literature concerned with the meaning of volunteering provides the scope to identify specific issues affecting the voluntary 'workforce' that can emerge for VOs in response to the competing interests and values of the state and organisational members. Additionally, the framework captures what these tensions in the social order mean for VOs, and the sector more broadly.

By virtue of the historically under-researched nature of the voluntary sector and the lack of critical engagement with the volunteer experience, a conceptual framework is a useful tool for advancing theorisations of voluntary work and the volunteer experience. As illustrated throughout the first of the two literature review chapters, the context of austerity cultivates an environment that is defined and constrained by a series of isomorphic pressures (coercive, mimetic and normative), particularly evident through the synthesis of evidence related to the ever-changing but increasingly interdependent sector-state relationship and the consequent calls for enhanced professionalisation and improved performance management

(through enhanced legitimacy, accountability and improved efficiency and effectiveness). The espoused outcome of isomorphism is improved service delivery (achieved through the imposition of professionalisation and politically driven NPM agendas). However, the dual imperative of imitation/conformity against the desire for an alternative/distinctive service offering that upholds the values of the sector is reconfiguring the meaning of volunteering for organisational members. The research questions were born out of a desire to advance theorisations of the volunteer experience, thus, the three research questions were designed to explore a different aspect of ‘being’ a volunteer and ‘doing’ volunteer work.

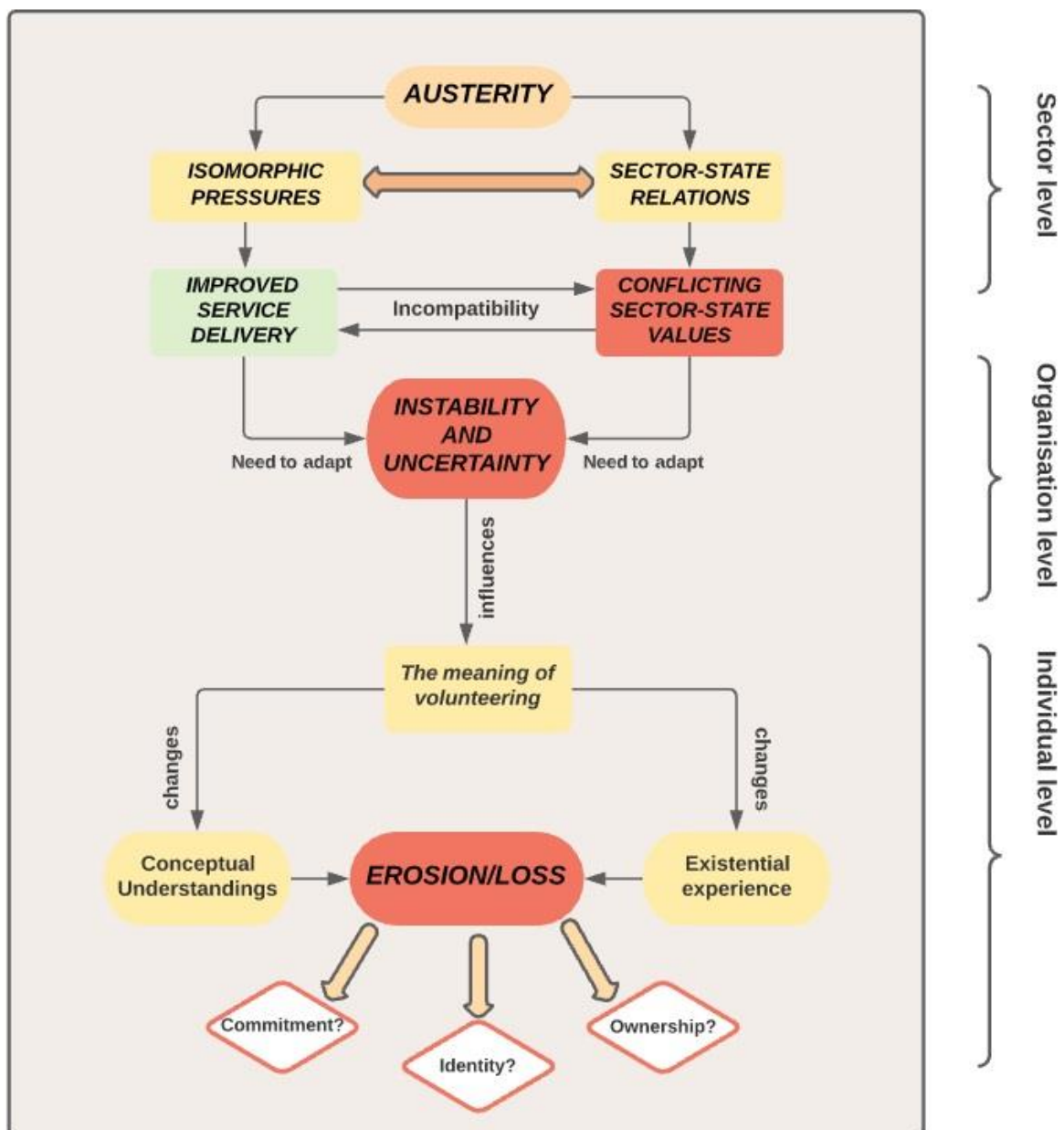


Figure 3. 1 Conceptual framework of the volunteer experience

3.8.1 Research questions

Research question one explores conceptualisations of volunteering with a view of demarcating the context within which volunteer work is situated (and how it is similar and different to comparable paid roles) and to establish the extent to which volunteer work is changing with the imposition of professionalisation. This first research question is captured in the ‘conceptual understandings’ component of the framework. Research question two examines the nature of volunteer ‘work’ and the extent to which this provides value and meaning to volunteers. In particular, the emphasis here is on the type of voluntary work being undertaken and draws on theorisations of ‘emotion work’ to explore whether this contributed to the sense of significance that such work provides. This second research question is captured in the ‘existential experience’ component of the framework. Research question three explores the effect of professionalisation and organisational change on the experiences of volunteers. Herein, the twin pressures of improved efficiency, accountability and legitimacy and the desire of volunteers to preserve the organisational values and identity explored. This research question explores how volunteers experience tensions in the social order and the extent of their resistance. This final research question is captured in the ‘erosion/loss’ component of the framework and seeks to explore the effect of this on volunteer commitment, identity and ownership. Noteworthy, each of the three research questions are positioned as the ‘individual level’ of the framework since the purpose of this research is to advance theorisations of the volunteer experience.

This research is driven by the following research questions which have emerged out of identified empirical and theoretical gaps:

1. How do volunteers understand and conceptualise Helpline and are these meanings influenced by the crisis line environment that the organisation operates in?
2. How do volunteers understand and experience their roles and responsibilities within Helpline?
 - a. What constitutes the ‘work’ of a Helpline volunteer?
 - b. What do those who volunteer for Helpline value about doing so?
3. How are externally driven organisational changes affecting volunteers’ experiences and in what ways is resistance demonstrated?

Chapter Four: The Case Organisation and Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This current study was designed to explore the meaning of volunteering, in both a conceptual and existential sense. To empirically and theoretically develop this body of work, this research sought to address the largely under-explored topic of the ‘volunteer experience’. Additionally, at the centre of this research, was the dynamic of organisational change and what affect this had on volunteers, their experiences and the meanings they ascribed to their volunteering efforts. The research approach in this study was anchored around an ambition to explore the involvement and experiences of volunteers through their own voices, thus, designing an appropriate framework that captured and communicated the narrative of volunteers themselves was a priority (Patton 2002: 47).

The purpose of this chapter is twofold, firstly the case organisation will be reintroduced to the reader, in a more detailed manner than the introduction allowed, as this will help frame the methodological aspects of the research (covered in section 4.2). Secondly, the chapter will outline the methodological and theoretical approach adopted in the research (covered in section 4.3). In this second stage, the series of decisions that I made about the research will be explained. Firstly, the theoretical approach underpinning the research will be unpacked, before moving on to discuss the research methodology. Subsequently, practical research issues are examined at length, beginning with the research and data analysis methods, followed by the standards taken to ensure quality and rigour, and concluding by addressing research ethics. By drawing the reader’s attention to the ways in which the data was created, analysed and reported, “the reader can make up their own mind about the ‘biases’ or ‘spins’ of the writer” (Watson 2000: 502).

4.2 The case study: Helpline

As outlined in the introduction, Helpline is a large national charity registered in the UK and Ireland whose vision is that fewer people die by suicide. The service is delivered by an army of more than 21,000 volunteers who are responsible for providing a twenty-four-hour, 365 day a year confidential listening service to anyone that needs someone. Volunteers offer emotional support for people who are experiencing feelings of distress or despair, including those which may lead to suicide. Noteworthy, volunteers do not offer professional expertise; their role is not that of doctor or counsellor and their purpose is not to ‘save’ those who have reached out. Instead, the role of the volunteer is to offer support and empathy in a safe

environment to people in crisis. Contributing to this sense of uniqueness and further distinguishing Helpline from state-provided services is its core values which are tied to organisational expectations that underpin the Helpline service (see figure 4.1). This sense of offering a distinctive service is an important and central element of the research which will be returned to in the following chapters.

Established over 60 years ago, Helpline began with the aim of providing an emergency service for suicidal people. Since then, the service offering has advanced and, in some ways, has modernised. In recent years, Helpline has reoriented itself from a largely reactive crisis service to one that provides more pre-emptive forms of emotional support. For example, volunteers play an active role in community settings such as, in prisons and schools. Moreover, Helpline has developed a series of partnerships with: Network rail; emergency services, local GPS and mental health service providers to name a few. This work enables Helpline to encourage people to contact the service before the point where suicidal thoughts occur. Importantly though, the original mission of listening to people who are contemplating suicide continues to serve as the model of support within which volunteers operate. Contact occurs primarily through Helpline's telephone service, but email, SMS and face-to-face contact are also available. To avoid complication around the different forms of contact, those who get in touch with Helpline will be synonymously referred to as 'callers' or 'service users' throughout this thesis.

Demand for the Helpline service is high and increasing against both, a backdrop of austerity and more specifically, a lack of funding for 'Cinderella' services such as those targeting mental health. Volunteers currently respond to a service user every six seconds and are located across more than 200 branches. Additionally, Helpline has a central Head Office, named 'Central Charity', which accommodates 150 members of paid staff.

Noteworthy, upon the successful enrolment of candidates into the organisation, new recruits are put through an extensive two-stage training and mentoring process. The first stage comprises a 10-week training course designed to introduce the role and its subsequent expectations to new volunteers. Furthermore, it ensures that new recruits understand what are deemed appropriate emotional displays and desired emotional outcomes. Successful completion of the 10-week training period advances the volunteers' status to 'fully fledged' member and here, volunteers embark upon the second phase of training. This stage pairs the new volunteer with an experienced member of the organisation to act as the mentor to the new recruit while volunteers begin taking calls. This training phase supplements the initial phase and develops volunteer knowledge by 'learning on the job'. This mentorship approach

means that new volunteers are supervised for the first 4–6 months of their shifts to ensure that they are correctly implementing the previously taught techniques of the role. Throughout both phases of training, volunteers are instructed to respond to the perceived feelings and expressions of callers in a manner that upholds the values of the organisation.

Helpline's vision	is that fewer people die by suicide.
Helpline's mission	is to make sure there is someone there for anyone who needs someone.
Helpline's values:	
Listening:	Exploring feelings alleviates distress and helps people to reach a better understanding of their situation and the options open to them.
Confidentiality:	If people feel safe, they are more likely to be open about their feelings.
Non-judgemental:	We want people to be able to talk to us without fear of prejudice or rejection. People making their own decisions wherever possible.
Self-determination:	We believe that people have the right to find their own solution and that telling people what to do takes responsibility away from them.
Human contact:	Giving people time, undivided attention and empathy meets a fundamental emotional need and reduces distress and despair.

Figure 4. 1 Helpline's vision and core values

4.2.1 History of Helpline's structure

An understanding of Helpline's (changing) organisational structure is essential if the reader is to understand the case organisation at all; the structure provides the context for this thesis since there is little that can be explained, or grasped, without first establishing its importance. In recent years, Helpline has faced a great challenge which stemmed (in some way) from a polarisation between localism and scale. The question at the heart of this challenge was whether Helpline's branches should be close to their beneficiaries, and therefore rooted in local communities, or whether, as a more coherent organisation, it should play a role on a national stage through its size and influence. The implications of this decision continue to loom over the organisation today, as I will demonstrate in the following chapters.

Up until 2016, each Helpline branch was a separate charitable unincorporated association, operating within a federated structure. This is important. At their most basic level, federated charities are organisations with semi or fully autonomous members (branches) linked to a central organisation (Central Charity located in Surrey). Up until this point, each of Helpline's branches functioned in this way, with financial and operational independence. Financially, branches were responsible for managing their own reserves and for raising their own funds to cover the costs associated with the running of individual branches. Operationally, branches relied on volunteers and a sense of localism for all organisational matters. Services were rooted in the needs of the community and thus, branches were closely connected to the local people. Often, branches were set up by a group of these local people to address a local need; a powerful bottom-up approach. The purpose of 'Central Charity' was to serve as a supportive function for the network of branches, enabling them to carry out their services. The centre did not hold the power of veto and change was negotiated through consensus. Federated charities are often criticised for being structurally complex and funders, in particular, put pressure on federations to merge or streamline to become more efficient (Vliet and Wharton 2014). Despite the great deal of autonomy that this structure enabled branches and volunteers to enjoy, Helpline (at a broader organisational level) acknowledged some of the associated issues, such as those related to decision making and strategy. In April 2016, as part of the programme of change to Helpline's way of working, all branches were required to decide whether to a) maintain their (legal) independence by 'affiliating' with Helpline's Central Charity or b) 'join' the Central Charity, and no longer be a separate legal entity. The implications of this decision form the basis for the analysis of this research.

4.2.2 Organisational change

Organisational change has been a constant feature within Helpline for more than a decade; with the intensity ramped up considerably in the last five years. These changes reflect the wider political and economic shifts of the external environment (outlined in chapter two), which continue to shift and shape Helpline's organisational priorities. For example, challenges faced by Helpline which have instigated organisational change include: trends and patterns in suicide rates (e.g., high risk populations); changing factors and evidence associated with suicidal behaviour (e.g., socio-economic changes); the need for integrated, collaborative working across sectors to reduce suicides; disjointed and insufficient services for people who are suicidal and/or suffering with mental health and finally, challenges posed

by an increasingly ‘digital’ society. Below, I have mapped the four key areas of improvement which Helpline are focussed on as a way of enhancing their impact. They include: service, access, influence and evidence (see figure 4.2).

1. Improving the service	2. Increasing access
<p>Improve the quality and consistency of service.</p> <p>Be responsive to the needs of service users.</p> <p>Consistently implement quality assurance processes across services and projects.</p> <p>Improve volunteer training and volunteer management.</p>	<p>Ensure all services are free to callers and that volunteers are reached with every call made.</p> <p>Targeted and evidence base awareness-raising campaigns.</p> <p>Integrated provision of email, SMS and instant messaging support.</p> <p>Provision of emotional support outside of branch in targeted settings.</p> <p>Provision of support in targeted settings for those affected by a suicide.</p>
3. Influencing policy and practice	4. Using Evidence to inform work
<p>Continue to strengthen referral relationships with partner agencies working with vulnerable groups. (especially men in middle years, people in socio-economic deprivation and people with mental health problems).</p> <p>Continue to nurture relationships locally and nationally in order to influence the content and implementation of local and national suicide prevention policies and plans.</p> <p>Increase help-seeking and influence public policy and practice.</p>	<p>Demonstrate approach to supporting people, the benefits it provides and its contribution to reducing suicide.</p> <p>we apply existing evidence around ‘what works’ to improve and develop support services.</p> <p>Continue to evaluate the impact of Helpline’s strategy.</p>

Figure 4. 2 Overview of Helpline’s four priority areas at the time of data collection

Now that the case organisation has been introduced, this chapter proceeds to explain the series of decisions that I made regarding the research. Firstly, the theoretical approach underpinning the research will be presented, followed by a discussion of the research methodology, including data analysis, ‘quality’ and research ethics.

4.3 Methodology

When embarking upon a research project, often, enthusiasm over the empirical overshadows the more reflective and philosophical aspects that a research endeavour needs to address. In this section of the chapter, I will outline the methodological and theoretical approach adopted in the research and will explain the series of decisions that I made. I begin by reviewing the two dominant philosophical paradigms within which volunteering studies reside. Based on this review, I will explain why I reject the positivist paradigm in favour of an interpretivist one and will describe the philosophical commitments that underpin this research. To effectively undertake research, it is necessary for researchers to consider the knowledge paradigm within which current studies within their field reside, and what, as a result, they hope to achieve in their own studies (Guba and Lincoln 2005).

Each research study is guided by the choice of methodology, which in turn is driven by the research paradigm which concerns: the nature of reality (ontology); how the knowledge about reality is understood (epistemology) and the role of values (axiology). The following is structured around Guba and Lincoln's (1989: 83) three components of a research paradigm (ontology, epistemology, and methodology) since "each component helps to explain how we come to know what we know". According to Grix (2002), the starting point of all social science research is ontology, after which comes a researcher's epistemological and methodological positions. Each of these components are inextricably linked. Firstly, ontology is the 'science or study of being' (Blaikie 2003: 8) and concerns what constitutes reality, in other words what *is*. Ontology addresses whether the 'reality' represents an objective existence, external to and independent from individual cognition, or whether 'reality' is a product of individuals' subjective consciousness. This individual perception of how things really are and how things really work, fundamentally shapes the way in which a researcher will conduct their investigations. Secondly, epistemology is "the theory or science of the method or grounds of knowledge" (Blaikie 2003: 8) and concerns how knowledge is created, acquired and communicated. In other words, what it means to *know* (Blaikie 2003). More simply, epistemology is concerned with claims regarding the ways in which, what is presumed to be existent, may be known (Blaikie 2003). Different paradigms inherently contain differing ontological and epistemological views and thus they have differing assumptions of reality and knowledge which underpin their particular research approach; this is reflected in a researcher's choice of methodology and methods. Finally, methodology is concerned with the ways in which knowledge is generated and justified (Blaikie 2003).

Methodology is the strategy which underpins the choice and use of particular methods. According to Guba and Lincon (1994: 108) the methodological question is: “how can the inquirer go about finding out whatever they believe can be known?”.

4.3.1 Positivism

Positivism is a prominent paradigm of academic inquiry and has a long history in the development of science. The meaning of the term ‘positivism’ has evolved over the years, though, at its core, several key aspects have remained (Crotty 2003). For example, positivists believe that: there are facts that can be proven; reality is the same for each person and observation and measurement tell us what that reality is. Ontologically, positivism assumes that there is an objective external reality that exists independently of the knower. In other words, the researcher and the world are separate, with the world existing regardless of the researcher’s presence (Bryman 2008; Howell 2013). This one external reality is discoverable by the researcher who aims to formulate laws, thus yielding a basis for prediction and generalisation (Collis and Hussey 2009). An objectivist epistemology seeks to “explain and predict what happens in the social world by searching for regularities and causal relationships between its constituent elements” (Burrell and Morgan 1979: 5). According to this approach, knowledge is objective and tangible and requires an observer to generate impartial and quantifiable explanations. Thus, it maintains that researchers are capable of adopting a distant, detached, neutral and non-interactive position.

Methods developed to understand the natural world are not always directly transferable to the social world, and consequently, the positivist paradigm has come under considerable criticism in recent decades, particularly where sociological study is concerned. Here, the following criticisms form the basis for why I reject the positivist paradigm in this study. Firstly, the process of scientific development within positivist research has been described as being too linear; Sayer (1992) argues that positivist research overlooks the complexities that characterise the social sciences. He argues that not only are human actions complex, but that they have multiple meanings. Moreover, the blindness of quantitative techniques may encourage the belief that complex actions can be treated as reducible to some simple behaviour, as if each action had the same meaning regardless of context. Secondly, critics question whether researchers are ever wholly objective; Rubin and Babbie (2010: 15) for example, have argued that researchers are instead, part of what they observe, bringing their own values and interests to the research. Finally, the scientific approach which positivism espouses, according to Antonesa et al (2006), is inadequate when it comes to

learning about how people live, how they experience the world and how they adapt to it. As the researcher, I acknowledge my personal alignment with these criticisms. In relation to this study, 'multiple meanings', 'researcher beliefs and values' and 'experiences of the world' (the three aforementioned criticisms) are central aspects of this study; primarily identifiable through the research topic: 'how volunteers experience their volunteering and how they adapt (or don't) to organisational change'.

4.3.2 Interpretivism

After residing in a relatively subordinate position in the shadows of positivistic research, recent decades have witnessed a resurgence of interest in interpretative perspectives (Prasad and Prasad 2002). This has been achieved by interpretive inquiry addressing questions that cannot be sufficiently answered by traditional experimental or survey methodologies (Hatch and Yanow 2005). In light of the criticisms of the positivist paradigm, this thesis values the opposing interpretivist research paradigm which favours a subjectivist outlook. The ontological position of interpretivism is relativism; the view that reality is subjective and differs from person to person (Guba and Lincoln 1994: 110). Within this view, reality is individually constructed; there are as many realities as individuals and thus, underpinning this paradigm is the idea that multiple socially constructed realities exist. Put simply, people play an active role in constructing their own realities of the world and as a result, social reality is subjective and nuanced (Guba and Lincoln 1989: 84). Epistemologically, interpretivism embraces a position of social constructionism, wherein the researcher aims to understand and interpret the realities of individuals by uncovering the meanings behind everyday happenings (events), experiences and social structures. Furthermore, this approach acknowledges the role of values (moral or aesthetic) and emotions in constructions of reality (Collis and Hussey 2009; Rubin and Babbie 2010). A marked distinction from positivism that assumes that human behaviour can only be understood exclusively through quantitative analysis (Schwandt 2007). The social constructionist tradition "refutes positivist epistemologies in which social reality is an objective fact to argue that social reality is variable between social actors located in specific social contexts, times and places" (Garfinkel 1967: 35).

4.4 Research design and process

The research design is the general plan for linking the conceptual research problem to pertinent and feasible empirical research. The research design is simply, the framework for a study that guides data collection and analysis (Churchill and Iacobucci 2002; Patton 2002). The selection of a research design requires a range of decisions to be made, which, at an operational level, will include selecting the research questions, deciding what data to collect, by what method, from whom and in what form. The strategic choice of the research design must enable the research problem to be answered in the most effective way possible, whilst also remaining within the constraints of the researcher (Ghauri and Grønhaug 2002). The under-researched nature of volunteers' experiences (outlined in chapter three) required data collection methods that lent themselves to a) developing a broader understanding of the field and b) rich description and opportunities to unpack and contextualise the volunteer experience. This thesis seeks to answer 'how' and 'why' research questions (see chapter three); thus, theory building was valued over theory testing (Yin 2018). Consequently, a qualitative, idiographic approach was considered the most appropriate for this study as it was likely to elicit the requisite 'thick descriptions' (Denzin and Lincoln 2008; Jarvie and Zamora-Bonilla 2011). O'Toole and Grey (2016:89) note "thick descriptions are rich, dense and evocative accounts of human experience" that operate as forms of translation; providing an account that "non-members of that culture can find intelligible and compelling". This thesis employed an inductive case study approach to create rich, empirical descriptions of multiple cases (Eisenhardt and Graebner 2007: 25). The following section explains the reasons for the adoption of a case study research strategy.

4.4.1 Multi-site case studies

As depicted at the beginning of this chapter, Helpline is a unique organisation in terms of its structure, governance, service offering and core values. These characteristics make Helpline an unusual organisation, which in turn, affects the behaviour and experiences of volunteers. To capture the importance of this operating context, a case study design was selected. The phenomenon under inquiry, that is, the meanings that volunteers ascribe to their voluntary activity and their experiences during times of organisational change, cannot be satisfactorily considered in isolation of its wider organisational context. Moreover, some scholars have offered support for the use of case studies when investigating voluntary organisations; acknowledging the paucity of such research designs within voluntary contexts (see: Kearns and Scarpino 1996; Ghobadian and O'Regan 2011; O'Toole and Grey 2016).

As part of the collaborative studentship between the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and Cardiff Business School, Helpline was selected as the case organisation in advance of my appointment. The principal supervisor had therefore established a mutually beneficial relationship with the Regional Director for Wales and the Marches. While the case organisation was predetermined, the selection of branches to be involved in the research was not. Helpline comprises over 200 branches which, at the time of data collection, largely operated on an autonomous and independent basis. Data collection took place in five of the thirteen branches within the Wales and the Marches Region. The selection of branches was decided following a series of meetings between myself and the Regional Director. The reason for these particular branches centred around the desire to include a range of branches that had distinctive organisational attributes and characteristics (see figure 4.3 for a profile of branches). Attention was paid to branch size, volunteer workforce, geographic location and organisational structure. These factors, it was hoped, would ensure that different volunteer experiences were elicited. Furthermore, it was important to be able to compare findings between branches that were not necessarily similar.

Case study	Branch location	Year established	Number of listening volunteers	Outcome of restructure in 2016
1	Llandrindod Wells (Powys)	1994	31	Affiliated (maintained legal independence)
2	Swansea	1961	106	Affiliated (maintained legal independence)
3	Pembrokeshire	1976	37	Affiliated (maintained legal independence)
4	Gloucester	1962	120	Joined central charity
5	Worcester	1963	118	Affiliated (maintained legal independence)

Figure 4. 3 Profile of Helpline branches

4.4.2 Interview access and sample

This thesis sought rich, detailed accounts of volunteers' personal perceptions and experiences; thus, the most appropriate method of data collection was semi-structured, open-ended interviews. Interviews allowed for conversations that generated "deeply contextual, nuanced and authentic accounts of participants' outer and inner worlds" (Schultze and Avital 2011: 1). Moreover, open-ended interviews were necessary because they allowed respondents to expand on the issues which they felt were most significant and meaningful. Forty semi-structured interviews were conducted with both, volunteers who had management responsibilities and volunteers with 'ordinary' listening responsibilities (with no management responsibility) (see table 4.2 for profile of interviewees). Interviews lasted from fifty minutes to two and a half hours and took place at local branches (usually before the volunteer started a shift to ensure convenience for them).

Each interview began by taking a life history approach, asking participants to trace back their involvement with Helpline, how and why they had come to join and what happened once they joined. Established from the literature, the interview schedule was based on the following areas of inquiry; personal experiences with the organisation, ideas and conceptualisations of volunteer 'work', the role of emotions; experiences of organisational change; the volunteer-organisation relationship and individual and collective identities. These key topics formed part of each interview, but also allowed me to be flexible, responsive and participant-orientated (Valentine 2005: 111). The capacity for the interview design to evolve through responses was important (Bryman 2012: 470). Although the interview schedule was written formally, it was used flexibly as an aid to suggest questions and indicate which topics to cover. This allowed questions to be repeated and/or rephrased where necessary in order for interviewees to clarify and/or expand upon their answers.

Following conversations with the Regional Director, it quickly became apparent that volunteers might be sceptical or suspicious of me, this research and its purpose. At the time of data collection, when organisational change was pervasive, volunteers were particularly mistrusting of "outsiders" coming into branches. This was a situation therefore, that had to be managed carefully and sensitively. It was agreed that initially the Regional Director would discuss the research with each of the five Branch Directors (who were also volunteers) to try and secure their 'buy-in' before approaching other volunteers. It was felt that communication and access would be easier if Branch Directors were on-board with the research, the hope too, was that Branch Directors would agree to participate. Once this was established, it was agreed that Branch Directors (who tended to have cordial relationships with branch members)

would put out a ‘call’ for participants either via notice boards or email. Interested parties were encouraged to make direct contact with me to express their willingness to participate; this ensured anonymity which was particularly important given that volunteers’ experiences of change might not have been something they wanted to be vocal or negative about. Convenience sampling was applied due to the benefits of it being inexpensive, efficient and simple to implement. Moreover, the Branch Director advised that it would be best to be ‘unselective’ about who to interview; concerned that the increasing suspicion within the organisation may deter volunteers from participating (see table 4.1 for overview of branch visits).

Case study	Size of volunteer-base	Number of volunteers interviewed	Number of days researcher visited
1	31	9	3 days
2	106	7	2 days
3	37	4	2 days
4	120	13	4 days
5	118	7	3 days

Table 4. 1: Overview of branch visits

Access proved to be a somewhat sensitive issue beyond the regional level. Initially, it was hoped that access would be secured at national level as this would allow for paid personnel, (located at Central Charity) to be interviewed (as well as volunteers at regional level). However, there were some issues with this. Discussions with the Regional Director indicated that Central Charity might want greater control and involvement in firstly, selecting the research topic and secondly, in selecting specific branches for participation. Undoubtedly, personnel at Central Charity would have provided valuable insights regarding organisational change, however, it was agreed with the Regional Director that it would be preferable to conduct the research at a regional level as this would allow for unrestricted access to branches, including those that were more resistant to change (a benefit that I am unsure would have been afforded if the wider organisation was involved).

Prior to conducting interviews with volunteers, it was important for me to effectively communicate the goal and aim of the research. For this, I brought several items to each interview. The first was an 'information sheet' which explained the context and rationale of the research so that interviewees could understand the research context. In addition, interviewees were also given an 'informed consent form' and declaration. All interviews were digitally audio recorded.

Harnessing the aforementioned strengths of interviews enabled me to offer holistic depictions of realities that could not be reduced to a few variables. Since very little is known about the volunteer experience (and even less so about this experience during times of organisational change), the gap between theory and practice is apparent, thus emphasising the usefulness of this study's contribution to theory building. The intention with the selected methodology was to offer a different perspective to the research field since the current literature is saturated with quantitative empirical studies (see: Brown 2002; Caldwell et al 2008; Perkins and Fields 2010; Hartarska and Nadolnyak 2012; Bernstein and Bilimoria 2013; Bradshaw and Fredette 2013). One reason for the dominance of quantitative studies has been attributed to the nature of investigations which seek to statistically quantify and measure the representation of volunteer groups and cohorts (e.g., gender or ethnic representation) (Weisinger et al 2015). Another reason for the predominance of quantitative studies has been attributed to the overwhelming publication of volunteering studies in US journals which tend to favour positivist inspired research that seeks to establish causal relationships between dependent and independent variables using quantitative research methods (May 2011).

Branch	#	Pseudonym	Role	Sex	Service (years)	Notes
Llandrindod Wells	1	Jade	Listening volunteer	F	0.5	
	2	Bella	Listening volunteer	F	2	
	3	Amanda	Branch Director	F	19	Branch Director
	4	Paul	Listening volunteer	M	17	Former Director
	5	Rachel	Listening volunteer	F	23	
	6	Rena	Listening volunteer	F	47	Some leadership responsibilities
	7	Daniel	Listening volunteer	M	5	
	8	Tess	Listening volunteer	F	3	
	9	Patrick	Listening volunteer	M	5	
Swansea	10	Martha	Listening volunteer	F	15	Some leadership responsibilities
	11	Cali	Listening volunteer	F	30	Some leadership responsibilities
	12	Molly	Listening volunteer	F	8	
	13	Imogen	Listening volunteer	F	17	Some leadership responsibilities
	14	Malvin	Listening volunteer	M	1	
	15	Caitlyn	Listening volunteer	F	1	
	16	Isaac	Branch Director	M	13	Branch Director
Pembrokeshire	17	Sandra	Listening volunteer	F	8	Some leadership responsibilities
	18	Maddy	Listening volunteer	F	10	
	19	Ivan	Listening volunteer	M	5	Some leadership responsibilities
	20	Elise	Listening volunteer	M	1	Some leadership responsibilities
Gloucester	21	Jada	Listening volunteer	F	13	
	22	Philip	Listening volunteer	M	15	Some leadership responsibilities
	23	Rebecca	Listening volunteer	F	14	Some leadership responsibilities
	24	Kacey	Listening volunteer	F	12	Some leadership responsibilities
	25	Salena	Listening volunteer	F	3	
	26	Camila	Listening volunteer	F	4	
	27	Martin	Listening volunteer	M	5	Former Director
	28	Patricia	Listening volunteer	F	21	Some leadership responsibilities
	29	Adele	Listening volunteer	F	21	
	30	Charlotte	Branch Director	F	6	Branch Director
	31	Billy	Listening volunteer	M	10	
	32	Jacqueline	Listening volunteer	F	1	
	33	Mandy	Listening volunteer	F	4	Some leadership responsibilities
Worcester	34	Nick	Listening volunteer	M	4	
	35	Alanna	Listening volunteer	F	3	
	36	Dale	Listening volunteer	M	1	
	37	Alesha	Listening volunteer	F	2	Some leadership responsibilities
	38	Mariah	Listening volunteer	F	2	Some leadership responsibilities
	39	Nate	Listening volunteer	M	2	
	40	Marissa	Branch Director	F	4	Branch Director

Table 4. 2: Profile of interviewees

4.5 Data analysis

The data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2012, 2013) approach to thematic analysis (TA), which is composed of six phases of coding and theme development. Analysis was an ongoing iterative process of working with the data, seeking patterns and meanings, and going back and forth between the data and the literature. Engagement with the literature throughout the analysis process enhanced my analytic capability as it sensitised me to the more subtle and nuanced features of the data (Tuckett 2005). Moreover, I paid heed to the emotional tone of the transcripts and the ways in which individuals expressed themselves. Following Braun and Clarke (2006), I collated the numerous codes (organisational change, resistance, control, identity, meaning, identification, emotional labour, stress) into clusters, and in doing so considered how these codes could combine to form overarching themes. A great deal of time was spent thinking about the relationships between codes, between themes, and between different levels of themes.

The first phase of analysis, familiarising yourself with the data, involved transcription and repeated reading to immerse myself in the data. Transcripts were initially read with no specific focus, alongside this process of re-reading, I simultaneously jotted down my observations, thoughts, reflections and ideas in relation to the research questions. Additionally, I annotated transcripts with any other information which I gathered during branch visits regarding 'the feel' of the organisation (Parker 2000: 238) and the emotional tone (Rowlands and Handy 2012) of the interview, remarks which I had noted in my reflexive diary immediately after interviewing. I transcribed each of the forty interviews within two weeks of their occurrence to minimise any loss of the depth of meaning which was conveyed by respondents. I found that this was a very useful way to re-familiarise myself with the raw data. Once all interviews were transcribed and field notes and research diary were written up, the primary data was approximately 250,000 words. I considered using the software programme NVivo, however, after attending a training course, decided it was not suitable for the rich contextual data that I had collected.

The second phase of analysis, generating initial codes, involved a process of systematically working through the entire dataset to create codes. Interesting features of the data were broken down into meaningful segments and coded using a word or short phrase. Coding was done on two levels: semantic coding, which involves capturing the descriptive content; and latent coding, which focuses on capturing the implicit meanings within the data (Braun and Clarke 2013). Level one coding involved me repeatedly asking myself '*what* is being talked about here? What is the subject matter, theme or issue that the participant is

interested in at this point in the transcript?’. Descriptive answers were noted in the left-hand margin of transcripts. Level two coding involved me repeatedly asking myself ‘*how* is the issue being talked about? How is the participant understanding/constructing the subject matter, theme or issue that they are interested in?’. In other words, level two coding developed the picture that was starting to build from the level one codes; by teasing out how interviewees conceptualised and constructed these level one codes. In this second level of coding, I applied Heidegger’s (1962) ‘as structure’. That is, the interpretation of an entity “as” something. For example, one of my level one codes was ‘service offering’ in the level two coding, this became ‘service offering *as* unique’, ‘service offering *as* identity-constructing/affirming’.

The third phase of analysis, searching for themes, involved sorting and examining codes for broader patterns of meaning or ‘candidate themes’. Braun and Clarke (2006) propose that a theme should capture a significant aspect of the data in relation to the research question. A considerable amount of thought and time was therefore given to the relationship between codes and between themes, making sure that the codes collated within each theme captured meaningful and relevant aspects of the data.

The fourth phase of analysis, reviewing themes, involved reviewing the themes identified in phase three to make sure they ‘fit’ with the research aims. During this phase, I repeatedly refined the themes, rejecting some and modifying others. I checked that individual themes were clear and distinct from one another and related to the research question (Braun and Clarke 2013). Furthermore, I checked the validity of the themes to ensure that they captured interviewees’ narratives, through making sure the meaning of the individual codes was reflective of the themes. I created a thematic map which provided a visual representation of the meanings and patterns in the data; this aided my understanding of the relationship between codes and themes.

The fifth phase of analysis, defining and naming themes, involved ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells. Here, I constructed a narrative for each of the themes to help clarify and define their essence. In some instances, direct quotations from the participants were used in the theme names, thus staying close to participant accounts.

The final phase of analysis, producing the report, involved telling the “complicated story of your data” (Braun and Clark 2006: 23), thereby stressing the importance of capturing the narrative of the data and convincing the reader of the validity of the analysis. This was achieved through using enough participant quotations to allow for the evaluation of the

relationship between analysis and data. During this stage, I was mindful of the selection of extracts, and I purposively selected which extracts to include to ensure that each contributed to the understanding of the theme. Moreover, I considered which extracts conveyed the interviewees points of view most effectively.

4.5.1 Reflexivity and researcher identity

Researchers are arguably active agents in the qualitative research process; their values, interests and perspectives actively shape the research and the knowledge it produces (Braun and Clarke 2013; McLeod 2001). For this reason, many have highlighted the importance of reflexivity in qualitative research. The process of reflexivity requires the researcher to acknowledge the impact that their own experiences and assumptions can have on research outcomes and attempts to make this visible to the reader (Mortari 2015) Here, I aim to make my position as a researcher clear and will explain my relationship with the research topic.

I am someone, who for years, suffered in silence with my mental health. I come from a long line of staunchly proud working-class men and proud feminist women. The male influences in my life instilled in me the importance of ‘getting on with it’, ‘keeping your head up high’ and ‘showing resilience’. The women in my life, instilled in me the importance of ‘holding your own’, ‘proving yourself’ and ‘grasping opportunities [that they had not been afforded] with both hands’. My parents fostered children when I was young and this served as a constant reminder that many others had it far worse and far tougher than I could ever even imagine. I grew up supressing any emotion that was inconsistent with the narrative of strength that was perpetuated around me. I presented myself, in all scenarios, as someone who could handle adversity. This, unsurprisingly, did not last; troubled thoughts turned into anxieties and occasional sadness tuned into depression. By my early twenties, my anxiety was crippling and I eventually turned to a series of support services. I had plucked up the courage to seek help only to discover that state-services were inadequate, diagnoses were rare and medication appeared to be handed out inconsequentially. Despite this background, I very much considered myself an outsider researcher. I did not belong to the group under study; I was not a volunteer and I was not familiar with the Helpline work environment. However, I had, on several occasions (prior to the commencement of this research), used the Helpline service. I was a ‘caller’ and I was invested in the work of volunteers; feeling a connection to it because it had helped me during my darkest times.

Additionally, once I began data collection and as interviewees revealed their life stories to me, many of whom, had suffered mental health challenges, I felt connected to them, personally. This position raised some interesting considerations and it was imperative that I adopt a reflexive approach throughout the study; remaining conscious of my subjectivities and understanding of the social world, and actively questioning my familiarity with, not the organisation per se, but more broadly, the role and work of volunteers. With this in mind, I am inclined to agree with Breen (2007) who argues that the insider-outsider dichotomy is too simplistic. For me, neither term adequately captured the role I occupied throughout the research. Consequently, I purposefully applied the thought process of an insider in an attempt to maintain a degree of space from those that I was researching to avoid ‘blind spots’ (Greene 2014).

While this position gave no guarantee of access (since respondents were unaware that I had used the service), during interviews I disclosed my position to interviewees and as Miller and Glassner (2004) suggest, I believe that this encouraged trust and rapport with respondents and led to increased participation; an advantage typically associated with insider-researcher status. This could indeed have been a result of the interviewees seeing me, in some ways, as ‘one of them’ (Dwyer and Buckle 2009), providing increased opportunity for empathy, implicit understanding and shared experience (Hellowell 2006). The established trust that this position cultivated, I felt, made the interaction more ‘natural’ and open; potentially resulting in the generation of richer data (Hayfield and Huxley 2015). Despite this advantage, I was highly aware that my own experiences could heavily cloud the ways in which I conducted the interviews and viewed the data. I therefore had to be mindful of some of the disadvantages associated with ‘insider researcher’ status such as the “illusion of sameness” which Pitman (2002: 285) claims can increase the risk that the researcher makes assumptions based on their own experiences or prior knowledge. Furthermore, DeLyser (2001) noted that greater familiarity can result in the researcher being less inquisitive.

There are several methods that can be used when engaging in reflexive practice and I used techniques including self-interviewing and “stream of consciousness writing” (Van Heugten 2004: 207). I would regularly ask myself questions about the research topic and record my answers on a dictaphone. This helped me distinguish between my inner thoughts and beliefs from those of the participants.

4.6 Evaluating social research

The most influential model used to establish quality in empirical social research conforms to the “natural science model” (Popper 1964: 32) which evaluates the quality of research design using four positivist tests, they include: construct validity, internal validity, external validity and reliability (Behling 1980). This model acts as a framework for ensuring rigor by providing a set of criteria to adhere to. Qualitative research, according to critics, fails to assess quality and robustness. Advocates of the natural science model argue that social science research should emulate this framework in order to achieve findings of equal status to those embedded in a positivist tradition (Eisenhardt and Graebner 2007). Lee and Lings (2008: 201) however, question whether “one should be concerned with issues of validity, reliability or generalisability” in qualitative research. Sandelowski (1993: 1) asserts that “there is an inflexibility and an uncompromising harshness and rigidity implied in the term ‘rigor’ that threaten to take us too far from the artfulness, versatility, and sensitivity to meaning and context that mark qualitative works of distinction”.

Despite the acclaimed status that interpretive inquiry now enjoys across the social sciences, criticisms of the extreme relativism and reductionism it can sometimes entail, remain substantiated (Newton et al 2011). The idea of ‘quality’ in the research design has been contested across the social sciences as a result of the ongoing tension between the two opposing research paradigms mentioned earlier. They include, those of positivist orientation that tend to value quantitative inspired designs and those of interpretive orientation that tend to value qualitative inspired designs (Creswell 2003). In this section of the chapter, I acknowledge some of the limitations of qualitative research and attempt to justify why, despite them, I believe it an appropriate methodology for this thesis. This research avoids the quality assessment criteria that is applied in quantitative research in favour of alternative concepts that assess quality. I draw on Guba and Lincoln’s (1989) concepts of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

4.6.1 Credibility

Internal validity in positivist research is likened to credibility in qualitative work, both ensure that the research measures or tests what is intended. In quantitative research, credibility is achieved through reliability, replicability and consistency (Golafshani 2003). In qualitative work, credibility is achieved through practices including thick description, triangulation and partiality, and it refers to the trustworthiness and plausibility of the research findings

(Shenton 2004). Lincoln and Guba (1986) argue that ensuring credibility is one of the most important factors in establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research. Replicating research procedures carried out by comparable studies is one way of ensuring credibility in the research design (Shenton 2004). The research design adopted in this thesis is indeed, (somewhat) comparable to O'Toole and Grey's (2016) recent study that sought to develop existing conceptualisations of volunteering. In this study, the Royal National Lifeboat Institute (RNLI) was utilised as a case study to uncover what it *really* means to be a volunteer. Utilising semi-structured open-ended interviews, depth data was gathered to demonstrate how volunteering can be characterised by a complex social dynamic contrary to what existing literature has suggested. Rather than large-scale survey data that typically seeks to identify the determinants of inclusion or exclusion in volunteer participation, O'Toole and Grey (2016) employed a qualitative research design that enabled them to offer a more sophisticated and nuanced understanding of volunteering, thereby moving existing understandings beyond generally quantitative, conceptualisations.

O'Toole and Grey (2016: 90) borrowed Pratt's (2000) concept of an 'extreme case' to describe the RNLI, wherein volunteers carry out their work in "challenging and physically dangerous environments". It is argued that an extreme case "facilitates theory building because the dynamics being examined tend to be more visible than they might be in other contexts" (Pratt 2000: 458). I posit that Helpline is similarly an 'extreme case' insofar as volunteers are working in highly stressful and emotional settings. As in O'Toole and Grey's (2016) study, I employed semi-structured interviews to enable scope for volunteers to talk about aspects of their voluntary work that they themselves, considered significant and meaningful. Consistent with O'Toole and Grey's (2016) call future research that is methodologically like theirs, this thesis utilised a detailed case study to further develop understanding of the phenomenological meaning of volunteering.

The credibility of a study is also more plausible if there is: prolonged engagement between the researcher and respondents, persistent observation, and thick, rich description (Erlandson et al 1993). The conjecture underlying these criteria, is that spending more time on data collection in a setting provides time for trust to be established with participants. Consequently, increased trust is likely to yield better results and richer, more credible data. I arranged a series of preliminary and ad-hoc visits within various branches of the organisation before starting data collection in order to establish a relationship of trust and to gain an understanding of the organisation and its culture.

Finally, to demonstrate credibility, I developed a chain of evidence from the formulation of the initial research questions through to conclusions. Throughout data collection, I was keen to build rapport with interviewees and I encouraged interviewees to be honest and frank while emphasising my independent status. I also gave every interviewee the opportunity to change their mind about participation if they wished. Additionally, I kept a reflective commentary to record any initial impressions of each data collection session and of any patterns that emerged in the data collected.

4.6.2 Transferability

The qualitative equivalent for external validity or generalisability is transferability. Transferability is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to a wider population or to a different context. Studies that ensure such validity, are considered valuable and useful, particularly among scholars writing within a positivist research paradigm. Critics of the interpretivist research paradigm argue that qualitative research often lacks generalisability.

The challenge of generalisability is particularly prevalent within case study research designs because as Shanley and Peteraf (2006: 16) observe, “the richer the picture of a firm, the less possible it is to compare it to other firms - each is arguably unique”. Furthermore, Campbell and Stanley (1966: 6) argue, “such studies have such a total absence of control as to be of almost no scientific value”. Consequently, there is concern that the scientific utility of case studies is limited to developing hypotheses that might be tested by 'more rigorous' research methods. The intention of this study is not to make claims about the applicability of findings to other contexts. The representation of Helpline which I have constructed is only one among many other possibilities (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Van Maanen 1988). It is also important to acknowledge that the voluntary sector is hugely broad and diverse, with significant differences between organisations in size, scope, function, mission and role in society (Donnelly-Cox et al 2001; O'Neill 2002; Salamon 2003). Voluntary organisations “exist in very different contexts...linked to distinct histories, cultures, and political traditions throughout the world” (Anheier and Salamon 2006: 91). Thus, perhaps more pragmatically, the purpose of my inquiry was to examine local, situated understandings of the challenges associated with organisational change upon volunteers and voluntary organisations.

Despite the above discussion, I acknowledge that as a qualitative study I “cannot escape the nagging question of generalisation” (Wolcott 1995: 132). As Smith (2018)

identifies, by ignoring the question of generalisability altogether, the assumption that only quantitative results are generalisable and therefore, most desirable, will continue to prevail and remain unchallenged. Accordingly, I acknowledge the importance of engaging with generalisability on some level. One type of generalisation for consideration is *naturalistic generalizability* (Stake 1995). In that type of generalisation, which is sometimes also referred to as representational generalisation (Lewis et al 2014), generalisability is reached on the basis of recognition of similarities and differences to the results with which the reader is familiar. Smith (2018: 140) claims that “naturalistic generalizability happens when the research resonates with the reader”. Questions that determine whether the research ‘rings true’ include: Do the findings reverberate with the readers personal experiences? Do they feel as if the research was about them, and/or are the data and results recognisable in terms of what they have witnessed? I posit that this research has some degree of generalisability and value due to the context within which it occurs. For example, against the international backdrop of austerity, many VOs are required to professionalise and thus, it is likely that some of the features of this study share commonalities with other domains. This is particularly likely among other ‘crisis line’ settings where volunteers frequently deal with emotions of distress and despair.

In an attempt to offer any possibility of transferability, this research provides as much contextual information about the organisation, its location, population and participants as possible and by devising a concise and detailed case study protocol that guided the data collection. A case study database of the evidence gathered was kept, confidentially, and included transcripts, case notes, collected documents and an analysis of evidence. Keeping such records strengthens the repeatability and increases the transparency of findings whilst demonstrating that the interpretations are of the respondents’ and not of researcher bias. While attempts have been made to address this measure of quality, I acknowledge its limited scope in this study. The results of this study must be understood within the context of the characteristics of the organisation and as a result transferability is difficult to achieve in this case.

4.6.3 Dependability

In quantitative research, reliability refers to exact replicability of the processes and the results. For investigations that take place within a positivist tradition, the concept of reliability refers to the stability of the results over time. That means, whether the researcher

can obtain the same findings if multiple studies were conducted in the same context. Marshall and Rossman (1999) note that, in the case of qualitative research, findings are not necessarily intended to be repeated as they reflect the reality at the time data were collected, in a situation that may be subject to change. Moreover, Janesick (2000: 394) notes with case study research, “the value is often in its uniqueness so reliability in the traditional sense of replicability is pointless”. In qualitative research with diverse paradigms, typical definitions of reliability are not only problematic but, epistemologically, they are counter-intuitive. Hence, the essence of reliability for qualitative research lies with dependability and consistency. Ulin et al (2005: 26) observe, dependability refers to “whether the research process is consistent and carried out with careful attention to the rules and conventions of qualitative methodology”. In other words, dependability occurs when another researcher can follow the decision trail used by the researcher.

One technique used to establish dependability in qualitative studies is to have an outside researcher conduct an inquiry audit of the study. This entails another researcher who is not involved in the study, working with the researcher to discuss emerging patterns in the data. The idea is that this serves as a sounding board for evolving propositions, while enabling critical questions about the data collection and analysis procedures. It is a means for the field researcher to vet his or her ideas through another researcher to gain an outsider's perspective (Corely and Goia 2004; Lincoln and Guba 1985). However, due to the importance of confidentiality in this thesis, the ethics of including another researcher would be extremely challenging (see section 4.7). Moreover, this technique assumes that reality is fixed, and that truth is objectively perceived. In other words, the researcher objectively captures the truth and reality, which is in turn confirmed by an outside researcher. This understanding of reality is entirely inconsistent with the philosophical views of the researcher and the philosophical approach underpinning this research. Consequently, dependability was not a criterion that I attempted to achieve in this project.

4.6.4 Confirmability

Confirmability, like objectivity in quantitative terms, occurs when credibility, transferability, and dependability have been established. Confirmability is “concerned with establishing that data and interpretations of the findings are not figments of the inquirer’s imagination, but are clearly derived from the data” (Tobin and Begley 2004: 392). Confirmability relates to the level of confidence that the research study’s findings are derived from the interviewees’

narratives rather than potential researcher biases. Throughout data collection, I was conscious to *follow*, rather than lead, the direction of the interviews and interviewees were asked for clarification of definitions, slang words, and metaphors to ensure my own interpretations were not prioritised and that the findings of a research project were shaped by the interviewees themselves. Moreover, in my efforts to establish confirmability, I maintained a sense of awareness and openness to the study and unfolding results. I was actively reflexive and aware of how my own preconceptions, experiences and background might influence the research and thus, I kept a reflexive journal whereby I recorded field notes regarding personal feelings, biases, and insights immediately following each interview. According to Johns (2009), adopting a reflexive approach allows a big picture view with interpretations that produce new insights and thereby allow for confirmability of the research. Indeed, at every stage of the research, I also sought to be reflexive in my thoughts, questioning different angles and viewpoints, and making efforts not to overstate or overplay any given one.

4.7 Ethical Considerations

An awareness of ethical concerns is important in demonstrating that every effort had been made to avoid any potential psychological or emotional harm. Prior to any fieldwork being conducted, a research ethics application was submitted to the Cardiff Business School Research Ethics Committee. This application involved describing the fieldwork process, as well as highlighting any anticipated ethical issues and explaining how these would be mitigated by the researcher. The application was subsequently approved by the Ethics Committee, and the research was given ethical approval. One of the main ethical concerns addressed in the application pertained to issues involved with researching a ‘sensitive’ topic. In this study, the nature of volunteers’ work, would indeed be considered sensitive. As already outlined, volunteers are faced, on a daily basis, with issues of distress and despair. Moreover, as was discovered in the literature search, the motivations of volunteers to join specific organisations are often attributed to their personal experiences. Thus, it was likely that those I interviewed would have experienced (directly or indirectly) some form of emotional turmoil. Some questions asked were also of a sensitive nature and I was aware that some volunteers may have found these difficult to answer.

Consequently, I ensured that processes were in place to minimise the risk of any negative impact. Firstly, in order to mitigate risk, a strategy was agreed with the branch and regional directors. Within Helpline branches, there is a comprehensive system of support

built into its working model. This enables volunteers to ‘debrief’ and offload after troubling calls at the end of each shift. It was agreed that additional access to this support would be available to those who participated in the interview. Additionally, it was important for me that interviewees knew exactly what to expect of the interview and of the research in general, and informed consent was therefore a priority. Once volunteers expressed an initial interest in participating, I provided them with a more comprehensive summary of the research, its intentions and what to expect. I gave prospective interviewees an opportunity to ask any questions regarding the project and once they had all the information required and were willing to proceed, each participant was given an information sheet and consent form ahead of the interview. I verbally reinforced the key points from each of these sheets to the interviewee before the interviews started and highlighted that interviewees could withdraw at any time during the study.

Helpline, by its very nature is sensitive and the confidentiality of its volunteers and callers is very important, thus, ethical considerations were applied and held in high regard throughout and after the data collection process. All data collected from individuals was anonymised, and pseudonyms used for the organisation and interviewees. All interviews were transcribed and interviewees were made aware that they could have a copy on request. Furthermore, if a transcript was requested, I agreed to indicate any direct quotations that I intended to use, so that if anyone was concerned that they might be identified, I could either omit the quotation or para-phrase, depending on the interviewees preference. Finally, I agreed for Directors to read the findings and discussion chapters of the thesis before it is put in the library and if any concerns were raised, the dissertation would be embargoed, so that it is not made available to the public. Importantly though, results would be anonymised to ensure Directors could not trace specific findings back to individuals. If anything distinctive emerged which made particular interviewees identifiable and there was no way to ensure anonymity with certainty, then an exclusion criteria would be applied and these findings would not be included in the write up.

4.8 Summary

In the first section of this chapter, I introduced Helpline as the case organisation and highlighted some of its unique organisational features. I began the chapter in this way to help frame the subsequent discussion which described the methodological aspects of the research. In this second section, I outlined the methodological and theoretical approach adopted in the

research and explained the series of decisions that I made about the research. I have justified my reasons for adopting an interpretivist research paradigm which favours a subjectivist outlook. Subsequently, practical research issues were examined at length, beginning with the research and data analysis methods, followed by the standards taken to ensure quality and rigour, and concluding with addressing research ethics. In the following three chapters, I present my empirical findings; ordered by research question, before concluding with the analysis.

Chapter Five: Empirical Findings (part one)

A Distinctive Value-Driven Organisation

5.1 Introduction

In the following three empirical chapters, findings are presented in relation to each of the three research questions of this thesis. This current chapter presents findings related to the first overarching research question outlined in chapter 3, namely: ‘How do volunteers understand and conceptualise Helpline and are these meanings influenced by the crisis line environment that the organisation operates in?’. The analytic process, outlined in chapter four, generated the first overarching theme that captured volunteers’ perceptions of Helpline as ‘a distinctive, value-driven organisation’. This first theme captured the way that volunteers described Helpline as an organisation with distinctive features and characteristics that made it unlike any other voluntary or state organisation. Importantly, this conceptualisation largely refers to Helpline prior to organisational change, however, it was frequently discussed by volunteers in the present tense; a reflection of volunteers’ desire to maintain and fight for the meanings that they had long ascribed to the organisation (a point that will be unpacked in chapter seven). By introducing Helpline as a unique organisation, I am establishing it in a way that is consistent with how it was introduced to me by volunteers during the data collection process. During interviews, a significant number of volunteers were explicit about: the “unique” position of Helpline (in society); the “unique” role of volunteers and the “unique” service offering that Helpline provides. The development of ‘uniqueness’ as a significant and central theme was compelling. Nested underneath this are three sub-themes that contextualise and justify the overarching theme, they include: ‘A volunteer-led organisation’, ‘A value-driven organisation’ and ‘A commitment to uniqueness’. The ‘volunteer-led’ sub-theme examines volunteers’ perceptions of Helpline as uniquely structured. The ‘value-driven’ sub-theme examines the unique organisational values that underpin the service that volunteers are responsible for delivering. The ‘commitment to uniqueness’ sub-theme connects the first two forementioned sub-themes and examines the commitment of volunteers to Helpline’s uniqueness. The sub-themes introduced here, form the substance of the chapter and each is illustrated with relevant data extracts throughout.

5.2 A volunteer-led organisation

The first distinguishing feature of Helpline in the data was its “volunteer-led” organisational structure, which, according to volunteers, is a crucial and cherished strength of the organisation. ‘Volunteer-led’ was described in various ways by volunteers but most agreed that it constituted one, or a combination of the following: high levels of volunteer participation and involvement, a sense of autonomy where call handling is concerned and a degree of input into organisational decision-making. Overall, volunteers’ perceptions of being a member of a volunteer-led organisation were positive. For example, narratives suggested that being volunteer-led not only made Helpline more trustworthy in the eyes and minds of service users but it additionally empowered volunteers to take responsibility for the organisation’s direction, strategy and daily operational activities. In the following section, I will illustrate a variety of these understandings and perceptions using relevant data extracts.

Upon noting the “unconventional” proportion of trained volunteers (20,000) relative to the proportion of paid staff (150) at Helpline, ‘Marissa’ explained how the volunteer-led structure invoked greater trust among service users. In her view, this was due to Helpline’s rejection of the corporate, rational-bureaucratic organisational model that typically characterises other service-providing organisations, a clear distinction between Helpline and others:

I certainly think that the fact that we are volunteer-led is valued by callers because they know that volunteers are there solely to serve them and their interests. We [volunteers] advocate for them [service users] and with us, they’re not treated as statistics like they might be if they were to seek support from a more typically professional organisation that has to report to large regulatory bodies. Our structure allows us to treat them as individuals, as real people [Marissa, 4 years, branch 5]

Another interviewee, ‘Kacey’, similarly believes that Helpline’s organisational structure is conducive to the prioritisation of callers’ needs. Her view is that the ubiquitous presence of volunteers throughout every layer of the organisational structure provides opportunities for marginalised and vulnerable groups to be heard, which for her, is an important and valuable aspect of the work; to which she is highly committed:

The fact that there are volunteers everywhere means that the callers’ needs are always put first. We [volunteers] try not to get bogged down with bureaucracy because we want to act as a voice for those groups who don’t have that opportunity. That is why we are here and why we stay. Obviously, we have got chief execs but even two-thirds of the Board of Trustees are volunteers. Then we have the directors of each branch who are also volunteers and the regional directors, also volunteers. So everywhere you go in this organisation, everywhere within our structure, is embedded

with volunteers and that's a really special thing actually. We are a really interesting organisation, structurally, and that enables us to keep being a voice for our callers. The fact that we are predominantly volunteers is absolutely our strength [Kacey, 12 years, branch 4]

Many of the conversations during data collection suggested that the volunteer-led structure enabled volunteers to take responsibility for the organisation's direction, strategy and daily operational activities. In some accounts, volunteers described the unique organisational structure of Helpline as a part of its distinctive "brand". 'Amanda' is an illustrative case here, her own belief is that Helpline's unique 'brand' had been created and nurtured by 'grassroots' volunteers through their dedication, hard work and effort:

The fact that we are volunteer-led is like our USP really. The [Helpline] brand is so trusted, as soon as you answer that phone, you are almost automatically trusted because you are answering as a brand that is trusted. It is us volunteers, at grassroots level, who have gotten the organisation to this point [Amanda, 19 years, branch 1]

These feelings were expressed (or alluded to) by several other volunteers; 'Cali' referred to the "tireless work" of volunteers as the primary reason for Helpline's success and she captured the personal and collective investment of volunteers in the development of Helpline's brand:

I think what callers find most compelling is the [Helpline] brand. I feel strongly that volunteers have established and developed the brand image through their tireless work. If it wasn't for volunteers, there would be no brand. Not only are we the ones delivering that frontline service, but we are also responsible for the day to day running of the organisation [Cali, 30 years, branch 3]

In the following extract, 'Rachel' highlights the relevance of volunteers' efforts and posits that their responsibility to a) provide an effective service and b) ensure the efficient functioning of daily operational tasks, gives them the "right" to be in control of the organisation and its activities; indicating a degree of possession:

Our power is in the fact that we are volunteer-led because that's what makes us valuable, not just to the organisation because we're a free resource but valuable to our callers too, because it has meant that we've maintained this amateur, grass-roots feeling which protects us from too much bureaucracy. We [volunteers] have always had a strong sense of control because many have been here since the inception of [Helpline] and a bigger proportion have been here for thirty years or more. Volunteers are the ones who have developed the service into what it is today and we're responsible for keeping it going. Let's not also forget that we do all of this for free because we truly care. So, volunteers really have been unfaltering in their efforts to support those who need it and I believe that gives us the right to decide how we are

run and how best to support our callers [Rachel, 23 years, branch 1]

Many of the above accounts, as in the ones that follow, are indicative of the deep personal connection and attachment that volunteers expressed towards their work, their callers and the organisation. This was frequently attributed to the substantial involvement of volunteers' and for some, this manifested in a sense of personal possession or ownership over the role, the branch and by extension, the service provided:

The running and functioning of [Helpline] is largely the responsibility of us volunteers. Sure, Central Charity plays a role at a more strategic level but operationally, it is down to us. Central Charity has little jurisdiction over our branches so its aggravating when they try and get too involved. We are accountable for our branch's activities and we are accountable to service users. That's the way it has been for decades. It's our organisation and that's why what we do is so unique [Imogen, 17 years, branch 3]

'Amanda' articulated that her closeness to, and intimate knowledge of, callers' needs places her and her fellow colleagues in the advantageous position of truly understanding what is best for the organisation. This appears, in her mind, to afford her and other volunteers' greater control and ownership over the service offering:

As the ones serving callers directly, I think that that puts us in a really valuable position to understand what our callers need in terms of support. We are the vehicle through which a better and more effective service can be provided. That is the way the organisation is run. It is run by volunteers and we feel very strongly about our role here. Many of us feel protective over [Helpline] and what it offers [Amanda, branch 1, 19 years]

The above extracts reveal volunteers' conceptualisations of Helpline as uniquely structured. Volunteers' accounts provide insights about the manifold ways in which volunteers construct the "grass-roots", volunteer-led approach as a valuable asset which invokes greater trust among service users and a voice for marginalised groups. Moreover, volunteers' accounts demonstrate how the organisational structure limits bureaucracy, which in turn, affords volunteers greater freedom, autonomy and control over how they bestow their free labour. In the following section, I will present the second sub-theme, 'a value-driven organisation', to develop the overall picture of Helpline as uniquely distinctive by using illustrative data examples from volunteers' accounts.

5.3 A value-driven organisation

The second distinguishing feature of Helpline in the data was its strong “value-driven” approach which underpins service delivery. Volunteers revealed that Helpline operates on the premise of its five core values which function as underlying norms that: guide volunteer behaviour, shape organisational culture and drive the sustained commitment of volunteers. Volunteers revealed that the substance and content of Helpline’s underpinning core values are what makes the organisation and its service offering unique (see figure 5.1).

This section of the chapter firstly introduces volunteers’ conceptions of Helpline’s values as important and central to their work (section 5.3). The chapter then proceeds to present, through relevant extracts, how each of the values, independently, contribute to the construction of Helpline as a unique and distinctive organisation (sections 5.3.1-5.3.5). The figure below presents each of Helpline’s core values and the following section depicts their importance for both, volunteers and callers.

Helpline’s values:	
Listening:	Exploring feelings alleviates distress and helps people to reach a better understanding of their situation and the options open to them.
Confidentiality:	If people feel safe, they are more likely to be open about their feelings.
Non-judgemental:	We want people to be able to talk to us without fear of prejudice or rejection. People making their own decisions wherever possible.
Self-determination:	We believe that people have the right to find their own solution and that telling people what to do takes responsibility away from them.
Human contact:	Giving people time, undivided attention and empathy meets a fundamental emotional need and reduces distress and despair.
Helpline’s values:	
Listening:	Exploring feelings alleviates distress and helps people to reach a

Figure 5. 1: Helpline’ core organisational values

Volunteers revealed that they had initially been socialised into Helpline's unique norms and values during its extensive training programme but highlighted that their salience increased throughout their experiential and ongoing membership:

Initially, new volunteers are introduced to [Helpline's] values when they begin the training. I figured they were just included as part of the induction. They're the usual statement of how things are done and what the organisation is about. You can find any organisation's values on their website and let's be honest, people don't really pay attention to them, do they? They're just sort of there, a bit abstract, a bit corporate and a bit meaningless. I quickly realised that that wasn't the case here though. The values literally shape everything we do as volunteers and I realised their importance and relevance when I started to do the job. They really add value to the service and remind me of how I'm expected to conduct myself [Philip, 15 years, branch 4]

One volunteer, 'Kacey', emphasised the uniqueness of Helpline's values and revealed how the combination of them signifies to volunteers that they are "a part of something special", indicating a sense of belonging and commitment:

I joined [Helpline] because it is an organisation that listens to people in complete confidence, without any judgement. The organisation is defined by those values and that allows us to offer people an empty hole where they can talk to someone at three in the morning about how shit their life is. Where else can you get that kind of service? Nowhere. At the moment, we are absolutely unique, we stand completely alone in who we are and how we operate, and in the level of respect that we have got. For us volunteers, it is the incorporation of all these unique values that keeps us with the organisation because we are a part of something special [Kacey, 12 years, branch 4]

Helpline's core organisational values serve as both a guide for practice and an explication of the Helpline approach. Data suggested that they inform volunteers' perceptions about a) the essence of the organisation and b) who they are as individuals based on their membership to Helpline. Many volunteers indicated that the values are deeply ingrained in every aspect of their work and contribute to both, the organisation's sense of uniqueness and its sustained legitimacy, as demonstrated by 'Daniel':

The service is truly unique insofar as it is non-judgemental and confidential. We provide a necessary service which really, isn't available elsewhere and that's what legitimises us. All of the core values that we endorse as an organisation determine how we behave and how we deliver the service. The values aren't just something we post on the website to show we are a 'good' organisation; volunteers truly embrace them. I think this extends even to outside the organisation; the values here have changed how many of us volunteers see the wider world [Daniel, 5 years, branch 1]

'Rebecca' indicated that the values are an expression of the organisation's identity insofar as they reflect volunteers' collective understandings of Helpline's culture, history, structure, characteristics, status and reputation. Furthermore, Helpline's identity appears to reflect

members' collective and shared beliefs about what is central, distinctive and enduring about the organisation:

Our core values are who we are. They govern how we deliver our service and who we are as an organisation. Those things have remained constant for as long as [Helpline] has been around. Our core values tell a story about what is important to us as an organisation and as a group of individuals. The reason so many people contact us is because people identify with those values. Those values are also the reason many volunteers are drawn here in the first place [Rebecca, 14 years, branch 4]

This introductory section has introduced volunteers' conceptions of Helpline's values as important and central to volunteers' work. In the following section, empirical examples of each of Helpline's five core values are presented. In doing this, the uniqueness of Helpline is not only substantiated but volunteers' commitment to them also becomes apparent.

5.3.1 Value 1: Listening

The first and most rudimentary organisational value described was 'listening'. Several volunteers agreed that this should be the first principle that new recruits grasp because it is the central component upon which all other values are constructed. 'Dale' indicated the complexity of 'listening' in the context of Helpline but believes that most volunteers have an innate ability to do it:

All we [volunteers] really have to offer our callers is our ability to listen. To an outsider, that seems like a pretty easy thing to do but it's actually not as simple as that. It's quite a complex process to master. We're taught in the training how to listen, and I mean really listen. Once you've mastered that, you build on it by adding all the other values into the service. The listening principle is really the foundation... I should caveat this by saying that most volunteers have an innate ability to actively listen. Not everyone is capable of it and I believe you need to be a certain type of person. The ability is often lurking just beneath the surface and the training helps to tease it out [Dale, 1 year, branch 5]

Other volunteers similarly referred to the complexity that accompanies learning how to effectively listen. Primary data suggested that effective listening is an inherent aspect of the work that is mandated by the organisation, this was reflected in the comments of one interviewee who made a distinction between passive listening and active listening:

When you simply listen in an inactive way, you can just sit back, chill out and passively listen. With active listening though, that's about really, really listening, and that is a skill that you develop through the training and through practice. With active listening, you are always listening to what isn't being said, as well as to what is being said. So, there are things going on in your head about the structure of the conversation and you learn non-verbal techniques to demonstrate that you're actively

listening, this could be non-verbal nods and sounds. Active listening is what we do here and it becomes a part of the style of it in time which nonetheless is incorporating all of those things that you have been trained and prepared for [Patricia, 21 years, branch 4]

This style of active listening, volunteers claimed, is a skill that, if developed and performed correctly, contributes to the uniqueness of the service. Several volunteers described specific practices and techniques that they utilise to demonstrate to callers that they are actively listening. For example, 'Martin' illustrated the importance of simultaneously saying the correct thing to callers while strategically using silence to give the caller space and encouragement to talk, indicating a need for balance:

Quite often, you need to bide your time a bit. To suss out the caller. Suss out what approach we should use to support them. You don't want to say the wrong thing or talk too much. So, you develop certain techniques, grunts and non-verbal nods. You must try not to be banal or trite when on the phone. Generally, you muddle your way through. You use silence to your own advantage, sometimes you use silence to try and draw the caller out from whatever dark hole they are in. The techniques we are taught are so valuable and you don't really appreciate their value until you get a call where you have to use them [Martin, 5 years, branch 4]

The conceptualisation of active listening as a skill was demonstrated by other volunteers who highlighted additional techniques that they utilise to convince callers that they are actively listening. These included: having a suitable tone; progressing the call at an appropriate pace and possessing a sense of timing for the delivery of certain elements of a call. One relatively new volunteer, 'Jade', emphasised the need to be tactful when offering support:

Some people will reach you on the phone in a complete muddle and in distress, sometimes they can be highly agitated and so your role is to basically calm things down without appearing to. You achieve this by actively listening to them. We must ask them, not many, but just enough questions, the right questions, and in the right tone of voice so that in their heads they are starting to channel their own thoughts. By themselves, they can then start to think about their own problems. With [Helpline], we don't give any advice and that really is the sort of mantra. Primarily, you are listening [Jade, 6 months, branch 1]

The data extracts included under the sub-theme 'active listening' highlight: a) that this style of listening is a skill that volunteers are required to learn and develop; b) that this style of listening is distinctive and contributes to the uniqueness of the service offering and c) that there is a great deal of effort that is required of volunteers to demonstrate to callers that they are actively listening.

5.3.2 Value 2: Confidentiality

The second core organisational value that contributes to Helpline's uniqueness is 'confidentiality'. Volunteers claimed that offering a confidential service allows callers to explore their feelings (and sometimes suicidal intentions) within the security of an anonymous, confidential setting. Volunteers revealed that caller's names, phone numbers and locations are unknown and there is no obligation for such details to be disclosed over the phone. Many volunteers indicated that they unreservedly operate on the basis of the organisation's long-established confidentiality promise which distinguishes Helpline from other organisations that offer a somewhat similar service. Volunteers commonly articulated the importance of absolute confidentiality, particularly for people who are in vulnerable and sensitive situations and who fear unwanted intervention from health and welfare professionals such as, social services:

I had a girl call me a while ago who wanted to talk about her father abusing her. I'll spare you the details, but it was abuse in all different forms, horrific stuff. She contacted us because she was contemplating taking her own life as a result of the abuse. She chose [Helpline] because she knew she could talk to a volunteer without the fear of being 'told on'. That is one of the criticisms of ChildLine, and we hear this from children all the time. Children sometimes are dissuaded from contacting ChildLine because they know that if they do, social services and the police and other authorities will get involved. So, children call us at [Helpline] because of our confidentiality promise. It is so so important and we, and our callers, value it enormously [Malvin, 1 year, branch 3]

Other volunteers indicated the importance of equally providing a 'safe space' for perpetrators of crime, since they too, are often desperate to discuss their concerns without the risk of being reported to the authorities:

Many volunteers feel that [Helpline] is an exceptional case from every other single institution and organisation in this country. Somehow, confidentiality takes precedence over anything else, at every single point, even if it were an abuser ringing about a child who, he himself, is abusing and harming. Volunteers feel that that abuser has the right to confidentiality. That is how important the confidentiality value really is. Of course, if it were an abused child calling and they wanted some form of intervention, we would facilitate that. The point is, whomever that caller on the end of the phone is, it is their individual wishes that are our priority and our aim is to protect that caller. Regardless of who they are or what they have done. That is how we are different from other services [Elise, 1 year, branch 2]

Offering a confidential service to both those who are abused and those who abuse indicates the importance of consistently providing a confidential service regardless of the content of the call. This value was described as being inextricably linked to the third organisational value, that is, non-judgmental service provision.

5.3.3 Value 3: Non-Judgemental

The third core organisational value that contributes to Helpline's uniqueness is the provision of 'non-judgemental' support to service users. Many interviewees claimed that this principle is critical for encouraging callers to contact Helpline because it ensures that volunteers abstain from making judgements or suppositions about the caller and thus, relieves the fear of prejudice and rejection. 'Maddy' revealed that 'truly' listening to callers means setting assumptions aside, and accepting callers without exception:

A lot of people talk about putting on a [Helpline] hat, so that really is the idea that you come through the door and you work within the organisation's parameters. That means, accepting that you're not there to judge or to offer advice, instead, you are there to be a listening ear and to be empathetic. So, there is that sense of having a little bit of distance. So really, it's about striking a balance between the two. People contact us purely because they know that they can discuss anything at all and we will not judge them [Maddy, 10 years, branch 2]

Other volunteers highlighted a difficulty in adhering to the non-judgemental value and thus, that they are sometimes required to suppress their own authentic reactions. This process involves cognitively complicated, emotionally challenging work:

You try to treat everybody in a way that is non-judgemental because that's the key thing here. You try to give everybody your sincere compassion but sometimes, that can be very difficult. I spoke to a guy recently who had come out of prison and he was a paedophile. He had had an awful life, and I guess in some ways you could say that he was predisposed to being a child abuser because he was abused himself. Having empathy with that guy though was really tough and unnatural. Sometimes, those types of calls can be by somebody who wants to sensationalise what they are doing. It's difficult because you're not allowed to judge. It's not for us to decide whether or not someone is suitable to receive the service. But I can admit to making judgements, I'm just careful not to allow that to come across to the caller [Martin, 5 years, branch 4]

Being non-judgemental appeared to be the value that volunteers found most challenging to embrace. Unlike Helpline's other values, being non-judgemental was not always an expression of volunteers' own authenticity and instead, was sometimes a matter of adhering to organisational rules (explored in greater detail in chapter 6). This was palpable in the above account of 'Martin' which suggests that this value can require more work to achieve the impression that volunteers do indeed, always refrain from judgement.

5.3.4 Value 4: Self-determination

The fourth core organisational value that underpins Helpline's service and contributes to its uniqueness is 'self-determination'. This value, volunteers indicated, is a distinctive and highly valued aspect of the support they offer to callers. Self-determination involves

respecting the autonomy of the individual and their right to independent decision making.

One long-serving volunteer, 'Cali', explained the importance of 'caller choice':

If there is one thing that we hold with great respect, it is our confidentiality and our self-determination values. Accepting that if somebody wants to take their own life, that is absolutely their decision and not ours. It is not our place to interfere, we just lead them, if we can, into better options and we just hope that they decide not to take their own lives [Cali, 30 years, branch 3]

The self-determination principle, interviewees stated, requires volunteers to understand and accept, in a non-judgemental manner, the choices of the caller regardless of the volunteer's own opinions and beliefs. One volunteer, 'Salena', highlighted the role of volunteer authenticity and states that self-determination applies even in the case where a caller decides to take their own life, perhaps whilst on the phone:

I had a young person who was actively suicidal and there was nothing I could do about it. I could only give them the biggest hug down the phone and let them know that they were not on their own. You say things like that because you genuinely feel it. You say that you want to hug them and love them and that you don't want to change their minds. There is something so uniquely profound about being a volunteer here, at [Helpline], that I can't quite put into words [Salena, 3 years, branch 4]

While most volunteers appeared to accept and embrace this core value, many spoke of their hope of preventing at least some suicides. 'Camila' described the process of offering callers the option of intervention, and highlights the necessity to proceed within the boundaries of Helpline's policy by accepting the caller's decision if that offer is rejected:

I had a call from somebody who said that they were going to take their own life, and I asked the guy if I could call him an ambulance... we're allowed to offer. He asked me not to try and stop him, and from then on, I told him that I wouldn't and that it was his decision. Instead, I said I would like to know, if he didn't mind telling me, what brought him here, to the brink of suicide. He told me and then he said that he just wanted to hear one last human voice and he said that this is where the call ends. He'd explained what he was going to do and how he was going to do it. I apologised and I said that I wished that there was more that I could do. You can't stop people though, it is their responsibility, their choice. As a listener, I do what I can, but I can't do the impossible. I have a very balanced view of callers and life and death and the decisions that come with that. You have to respect those decisions [Camila, 4 years, branch 4]

The accounts presented here demonstrate the interdependent nature between the non-judgemental and self-determination values. Data suggests, however, that volunteers find it easier to accept the choices of those who wish to take their own lives than they do to accept the choices of those who commit crimes that, in their minds, are unthinkable. The lived experiences of volunteers have a role to play in this dynamic, which will be explored more fully throughout chapter six.

5.3.5 Value 5: Human contact

The integration and consistent application of each of the above four values culminate in the final one, that is, ‘human contact’. Volunteers articulated that human contact involves giving callers their time, undivided attention and empathy in order to meet a fundamental emotional need and to reduce distress and despair. The idea of human contact, many volunteers claimed, is about being able to achieve the feeling for callers that they are speaking to a ‘real person’. Many volunteers indicated the relative ease with which they were able to achieve this through their own authentic expressions of care and empathy. The case of ‘Patricia’ is illustrative here:

What [Helpline] offers, is something that nobody else does. It is that idea of there being someone, a human person that you can turn to when everything else is no good and everyone in your life has gone and you feel like everything has just failed you. That is the bottom line, having that human contact. I do genuinely feel the compassion and empathy that I give to callers. I think because of the sort of intensity within which calls take place, callers would know if we were spinning them something that wasn't genuine. We have to be genuine, there has to be that human core, and this sounds corny, but it is that humanity to humanity exchange. In the conversation with the caller, it is ultimately my humanity to your humanity, no matter who you are, or what you have done, you can come here and feel safe [Patricia, 21 years, branch 4]

5.4 commitment

Throughout the extracts included in this chapter, Helpline’s values have been constructed by volunteers as not only necessary for effective service delivery but as, important for volunteers personally. The extracts indicate that volunteers embrace the values, not just as a requirement of the role but as a matter of authenticity and value alignment. ‘Rachel’ described the strong alignment between her own values and those of the organisation and indicated that they became increasingly pertinent and central to her self-concept as she was progressively trained and socialised into understanding the organisation’s objectives and codes of conduct:

I think the reason people join is because they believe so strongly in what the organisation stands for. So those values, the organisation’s values, often volunteers already have them ingrained in their conscience and that is why so many of us chose [Helpline] over any other voluntary organisation. It’s also why so many of us have stayed for such a long time, those values have remained. That’s my experience and it seems to be a common theme around here. The work we do here, is really tough and I don’t think people would take that on unless their own values strongly aligned with the organisation’s. Once you get in and you start the nitty gritty work and you complete all the training, and you witness the difference that we make to people’s lives, those values just become a part of who you are and how you see, not only yourself, but the world around you [Rachel, 23 years, branch 1]

Several volunteer interviewees explained that they personally identified with the organisational values and many believe that that identification enables them to ‘give something back’. For many volunteers, the feeling of ‘contributing’ to society appears to provoke a sense of self-worth, which in turn, drives their sustained commitment. This was reflected in the comments of ‘Maddy’:

It gives me a sense of worth and a sense of contributing to society and a sense of helping people at some level which makes me feel better about myself, so there is that personal reason. I apply a work ethic to being here and I do it to the best of my ability and I follow the guidelines to be the best volunteer that I can be. Ultimately, there is a personal connection with it, and that personal connection runs deep, I identify very strongly with the values that are upheld here. If I didn't have that personal connection, I wouldn't keep doing it, I would still volunteer in some form or another but maybe not with [Helpline] if I didn't have a deep, personal connection to it [Maddy, 10 years, branch 2]

In this final section of the chapter, the commitment of volunteers (to Helpline, to the unique values and to the service offering) is beginning to emerge. This was a central theme that ran throughout the course of data collection and the following chapters will continue to develop its importance.

5.5 Summary

This chapter has established Helpline as a unique organisation, firstly through an exploration of its volunteer-led structure and secondly through an examination of Helpline’s core values. This chapter therefore sheds light on volunteers’ conceptualisations of Helpline as a distinctive organisation, particularly in comparison to other voluntary and state service offerings (research question one). Furthermore, the organisational characteristics that have been examined throughout have been constructed and positioned as central to the work of volunteers (an important point that will be developed in chapter seven). This chapter has begun to acquaint the reader to the duality of organisational values as 1) a form of organisational prescription that controls the way volunteers deliver the service and 2) reflecting volunteers’ own understandings of themselves as individuals who, through their work, are able to express their authentic emotions. These two ideas capture an important tension between different essential ideas about the role of Helpline’s values (further analysed in chapter 7). In the extracts presented in this chapter, the concepts of commitment, value alignment, authenticity and identity have been briefly indicated and introduced; further unpacking of these concepts will occur in the remaining chapters to build up a comprehensive picture of volunteers’ experiences of organisational change (research aim).

Chapter Six: Empirical Findings (part two)

Authentic Emotion Work

6.1 Introduction

In this second empirical chapter, findings are presented in relation to the second research question outlined in chapter three, namely: ‘How do volunteers understand and experience their roles and responsibilities within Helpline?’. To comprehensively answer this research question, this chapter addresses two sub-questions. In the first half of this chapter (sections 6.2-6.3), the first sub-question is addressed, that is: ‘What constitutes the ‘work’ of a Helpline volunteer?’. In the second half of this chapter (section 6.4), the second sub-question is addressed, that is: ‘What do those who volunteer for Helpline value about doing so?’. The analytic process, outlined in chapter four, generated the second overarching theme that captured the ways in which volunteers made sense of their roles and responsibilities in Helpline as ‘authentic emotion work’. This central theme captured the way that volunteers repeatedly described their roles as: arduous, emotionally challenging and sincere. Nested underneath this are three sub-themes that contextualise and justify the overarching theme, they include: ‘the centrality of emotions’, ‘emotion management as organisational prescription’ and ‘emotion management as an expression of authenticity’. The first sub-theme, ‘the centrality of emotions’ examines volunteers’ perceptions and experiences of the type of work they undertake, with an emphasis on the ‘calls’ they handle. In particular, this sub-theme addresses three distinct types of call that volunteers identify as ‘emotionally difficult’. The ‘emotion management as organisational prescription’ sub-theme captures the organisations’ explicit demands for emotions through the recruitment and training processes. The ‘emotion management as an expression of authenticity’ sub-theme captures the way that volunteers freely give their emotions to callers, as an expression of their own authenticity and as a result of their lived experiences. The sub-themes introduced here, form the substance of the chapter and each is illustrated with relevant data extracts throughout the chapter.

6.2 The centrality of emotions

One of the most prominent sub-themes generated from interviewees’ accounts that pertained to their conceptualisations and experiences of their roles (research question two), was the centrality of emotions as integral to their work. Given that the very essence of the Helpline service is to provide emotional support to people who are experiencing distress or despair, the

centrality of emotions was an accepted and expected aspect of the work. Volunteer interviewees explained that people contact Helpline for a variety of emotional problems including mental health issues, self-harm, sexual abuse, relationship concerns, loneliness, sadness and suicidal feelings, or because they are in the process of suicide.

Many interviewees indicated that the majority of calls, and certainly those considered ‘appropriate’, comprise emotive topics in some sense and many made statements similar to the following:

Well, what haven't I seen? We get so many different types of call. It can be various things related to ill mental health and even that alone is a wide spectrum. So that could refer to someone suffering with mild anxiety through to someone suffering with severe schizophrenia or psychosis. Then we get calls from people who are suicidal. Some people contact us if they have experienced abuse, sexual or otherwise. And there's also the more run of the mill things like failing marriages, loneliness and bereavement. The calls are almost always emotionally charged. People are usually distressed but the level and intensity of that stress varies [Molly, 8 years, branch 3]

Some volunteers acknowledged that callers use the Helpline service in tandem with other sources of support, but most referred to Helpline as a “last resort” for many people who are often desperate for ‘help’. ‘Philip’ is one interviewee who expressed this perspective; his own view is that people suffering with depression is an example of a population who are frequently “failed by the system”. An underpinning logic here is that Helpline can effectively support these callers to prevent them from “falling through the gaps” in state services:

The breadth of issues that people come to us with are vast. For many people, Helpline is a last resort. Not always, but often our callers have sought help elsewhere and have been turned away multiple times, for whatever reason. A common one we get is people with severe depression who have been told they have to wait 12 months to access support. The amount of calls we get like that is astounding and it shows how badly society is failing these people. There are some serious gaps in state services, and that's largely due to a lack of funding. But how can we tell someone who is teetering on the edge of suicidal that they have no choice but to wait it out for 12 months. Inevitably, people fall through those gaps and that can mean that people take their own lives whilst waiting for support. I guess we act as a sort of interim buffer. Support services have been overstretched for a really long time now, our role is to be there for people to prevent them from falling through those gaps [Philip, 15 years, branch 4]

Despite widespread agreement that volunteers’ encounters are often emotionally charged, data suggests that volunteers do not categorise all calls as equally emotional. Instead, volunteers identified three different *types* of call, which they claim, demands the most of them emotionally. They include: suicidal calls; relatable calls and harrowing calls. Each is outlined below using extracts to demonstrate the different types of emotion work that

volunteers engage with.

6.2.1 Suicidal calls

The first type of challenging call that many volunteers identified, were those with a suicidal caller. Several volunteers made a distinction between two types of suicidal call, the first constitutes ‘suicidal’ callers and the second, ‘actively suicidal’ callers. ‘Martin’ differentiates these calls based on the emotional state of the caller:

There are two types of suicidal call, the first is where the caller is in emotional despair or is having a manic episode and is considering suicide. These callers are often at imminent risk of making a suicide attempt. With these calls, the caller focusses on what means or methods might be suitable for carrying out their suicide plans. The second type of suicidal call involves callers who are actually in the process of making a suicide attempt whilst on the phone to the volunteer. Sometimes a call could begin with someone who is contemplating suicide and then as the call progresses, they may become actively suicidal [Martin, 5 years, branch 4]

A number of volunteers recounted their experiences of being on the phone with someone who was in the process of taking their own life. In what ‘Daniel’ describes as a “moral” duty, he explains the process of accompanying the caller to the point of death and highlights, not only his obligation to incorporate the organisation’s self-determination value (pp. 103-104), but his “extreme commitment” to it:

The hardest calls are the ones where they [the caller] are talking about suicide and either the line goes dead, or the caller goes quiet... You never know what’s happened in that situation and that is really not nice. Sometimes they’ll [the caller] tell you that they have taken pills and then the line goes quiet. I try not to assume that that automatically means that they have died because that can really stay with you. Although, that is a part of the service we provide, staying with someone even to the point of death, if they want us to. In fact, that is one of our core values, self-determination. It’s an extreme commitment for volunteers, a moral one. I feel a moral responsibility to sit with those people in their final moments so that they are not alone [Daniel, 5 years, branch 1]

Like ‘Daniel’, many other volunteers described the experience of “not knowing” what has happened to callers once they have become unresponsive as, “one of the greatest challenges” with actively suicidal calls [‘Nate’, 2 years]. In another interviewee account, ‘Rachel’ [23 years] explains: “unresponsive may or may not mean that the caller has died but the uncertainty that comes with this can be a distressing and painful aspect of the work”. Other volunteers reported that they typically have no knowledge of what happens to callers once the contact has ended; although some admitted to checking the news as a way of confirming the outcome, as indicated by ‘Cali’:

It stays with you if it is a really bad call, particularly if you've had an actively suicidal caller and the line goes dead, that can weigh really heavy. We don't ever really find out if there has been a suicide, so there is always that nagging doubt in the back of your mind. I have heard people say they keep an eye on the papers, in case something comes up that links the call. I've done that too because the not knowing is what makes it linger [Cali, 30 years, branch 3]

Overall, calls where a person explicitly discusses suicide were identified by volunteers as challenging and sometimes, personally “distressing” or “painful”. These calls, some volunteers stated (or inferred) are often remembered sometime after the call has taken place and this sense of ‘lingering’ in the minds of volunteers requires a great deal of emotional process work (explored later in section 6.4). Within the depiction of ‘suicidal calls’ above, the strong commitment of volunteers to Helpline’s ‘self- determination’ value is further substantiated (previously explored in chapter five).

6.2.2 Relatable calls

The second type of challenging call that many volunteers identified were ‘relatable calls’. Volunteers who categorised these calls as the most challenging tended to explicitly refute the idea that actively suicidal calls were the most challenging on the basis that they are required to, as stipulated by the organisation’s self-determination value, respect the decision of the caller, whatever that decision may be. Relatable calls are those with which volunteers personally identify. ‘Sandra’ indicates that these calls are the most arduous because they contain content that reflects or relates to the volunteer’s own lived experience in some way. She goes on to deduce that this lived experience enables her to detect a similar sense of pain in the caller, which in turn, she warns, can lead to the reignition of volunteers’ own pain:

The calls where people are on the bridge is the misconception, it's not really these that are most troubling... It's the ones that resonate with me. So, people who have had miscarriages or have lost children, or people who are struggling to conceive. The actual pain of those calls goes in and spikes the pain that I have buried and that is a thing that you have to watch out for as a [Helpline] volunteer, you have got to know your own weaknesses. The ones that resonate usually require a longer period of time to process [Sandra, 8 years, branch 2]

A sense of life crisis was linked, by many interviewees, to their decision to become a member of Helpline. Such crisis, data suggest, often emerged out of a sense of loss; the death of a loved one, a broken marriage or a loss of job, identity or retirement. Consequently, the calls that resonate with volunteers’ personal experiences were often referred to as calls that contain

personal “triggers”. One volunteer, ‘Salena’, explained that triggers can occur in “either a direct or indirect way”. She explains:

A call might trigger an emotional response in you, if, as the volunteer, you have experienced something similar. Or, it can be an indirect trigger, perhaps you had a friend whose child took their own life and you witnessed the despair and helplessness of the parents. If someone then calls you with that same experience, you can relate to it. Often, you can hear the same level of pain in the caller as you did in your friend. Those calls are truly heart-breaking and it’s important to manage the impact of that to avoid burnout or compassion fatigue [Salena, 3 years, branch 4]

Like in the above accounts, several other volunteers acknowledged the implications of personal issues and experiences “coming up” while taking ‘relatable’ calls. Specifically, some addressed the potential risk that they expose themselves to in terms of their emotional and mental wellbeing. The need to ‘watch out for’ these calls and ‘manage their impact’ suggests that this process is an additional responsibility, which, in the first instance, is placed upon volunteers themselves. Volunteers’ willingness to expose themselves to the potential negative impacts of these calls suggest that the value of the work, in volunteers’ minds, outweighs the risks. Furthermore, the depiction of ‘relatable calls’ above, introduces the relevance and role of volunteers’ own lived experiences (further explored throughout the remainder of this thesis).

6.2.3 Harrowing calls

Many volunteers expressed an affinity (in different ways) to both the ‘triggering’ and the ‘suicidal’ calls (outlined above) because they were able to personally empathise with these callers’ circumstances (often due their own lived experiences). In these cases, volunteers either knew, or could imagine, what it might be like for the caller to find themselves in such emotional despair and needing immediate support. This though, is different to the third *type* of challenging call that was identified by volunteers. These calls are termed, ‘harrowing’ calls and contain issues related to terminal illness, paedophilia and human slavery amongst others. This *type* of call was distinctive from the other two because volunteers (as far as I could discern) had no lived experience of them; leading volunteers to invariably describe them as ‘incomprehensible’, ‘unimaginable’ and ‘inexplicable’. ‘Elise’ provides an illustrative account of these calls and acknowledges a time when she experienced ‘secondary trauma’ as a result of one:

These calls are impossible to identify with because the content of them can be so grotesque that they are beyond anything one could imagine...There was one call, in the whole time I’ve been doing this, that did stay with me in an adverse way. It was a

situation which was so extreme, it was almost beyond the bounds of belief and it was really really really distressing. It was the first time the person had called and it was the first time they had started to reflect on where their life had got to and it went on for over an hour and a half and it was like teasing out the tiniest little thing and then the next and then getting the whole picture. When I finally got the whole picture it was just unbelievable that somebody's life could be like that. It was in effect, a case of human slavery. I couldn't shake it, it had all sorts of graphic details which made it even more painful. For a long while, it truly did affect me and even now, I could recall the entire call. I won't do that here, or ever actually, because I wouldn't want anyone else to experience that secondary trauma that I did [Elise, 2 years, branch 2]

Similarly, 'Jacqueline's' experience of a harrowing call also sheds light on the adverse ways in which such calls can affect volunteers personally; she describes her indirect exposure to a first-hand account of human suffering as "truly traumatising":

The call that made me cry the most, where I was just in bits was one from a 17-year-old girl who said she was dying. At first, I thought she might be in the process of suicide, but I quickly learned that she had leukaemia and it was terminal and she was told two weeks prior that she was dying. She died on the phone to me, I guess she knew that she was about to pass which is why she called. Her parents were downstairs, but she didn't want to bring them up. Tragically, her parents found her shortly after she slipped away and I was still on the phone. I didn't hang up in case she regained consciousness. The screams of her parents, sorry I'm getting emotional talking about it, it really brings it all back. But those types of call are just beyond comprehension and I'm not sure volunteers ever get over the ones like that... it was truly traumatising [Jacqueline, 1 year, branch 4]

The depiction of all three types of call bring to the fore the emotionally charged nature of the work that Helpline volunteers undertake. Moreover, through the different types of emotionally challenging call, the need for volunteers to switch between a wide range of intrusive and complex topics is highlighted, as is the need for volunteers to concurrently deliver the right amount, of the correct emotion to callers whilst suppressing their own inherent emotional reactions. The following section, while still concerned with the type of work being carried out, explores the role of emotion and emotion management in greater detail and thereby further answers the second research question: 'how do volunteers understand and experience their roles and responsibilities within Helpline?'.

6.3 Emotion management as organisational prescription

The above depiction of the different types of call that volunteers receive demonstrates how precarious the interaction between the caller and volunteer can be. It shows that interactions are often emotionally charged, and at times, the support offered is timely and critical. In this current section of the chapter, the inherent organisational requirement placed upon volunteers to deliver the ‘correct emotional display’ by upholding Helpline’s values is exposed. In chapter five, the values were described as contributing to the perception of Helpline as a unique organisation. Here, I will show, through relevant data extracts, how the organisational values operate as form of control. This section will examine the ways in which the emotion work of volunteers is guided by administrative policy, organisational values and socially dictated emotion rules. Thus, organisational values are further established as the consistent thread throughout this thesis.

Establishing an “appropriate environment” for interactions with callers was highlighted by volunteers as important. The need for effective call handling was most often associated with the emotional intensity of calls. This was reflected in the comments of ‘Isaac’ who claimed that the “trick” to establishing an “appropriate environment” was to offer an “emotionally balanced” disposition:

It is essential that we get the atmosphere right. Some of our calls are really highly emotional so one wrong word could be fatal. At best, a wrong word could dissuade a caller from reaching out again. At worst, it could result in pushing someone over the edge. The trick is to offer an emotionally balanced service, so managing the emotions of our callers the best we can, while also keeping our own, natural emotional reactions in check [Isaac, 13 years, branch 3]

Establishing the correct environment was a recurring concept in conversations with interviewees. Data suggest that an extended aspect of curating this environment resides in the volunteer’s ability to deliver the correct emotional display to callers. The following section exposes the inherent organisational requirement placed upon volunteers to deliver the ‘correct emotional display’ and highlights the huge responsibility that is involved in doing so.

6.3.1 Recruitment and selection

The different types of emotion work that volunteers engage with was highlighted through volunteers’ accounts of the range of calls they receive (see above section 6.2). In this section, I will examine the behaviour and norms that surround the management of that emotion. The majority of volunteers indicated that the very essence of Helpline’s service rests upon the effective delivery of suitable emotional displays by volunteers. Volunteers were made aware

of the organisational desire for emotions early on in their membership. ‘Billy’ refers to the ‘giving’ of emotions as a requirement of the role and explains the pressure to perform emotional displays in accordance with organisational expectations:

We have to give our emotions to callers. In a sense, we are expected to give our emotional selves to our callers. Volunteers are made aware of that before they properly commit to the role. We are an emotional support service so it’s obvious that that will be expected of us. It’s a fundamental requirement of the role. We have to give our emotions in a way that supports the values, rules and goals of the organisation. So you know, giving our emotions in the right way, the [Helpline] way [Billy, 10 years, branch 2]

Discussing Helpline’s interview process, ‘Imogen’, reflects on how this phase of recruitment is utilised by the selection team to “assess” whether prospective volunteers have the ability to effectively “perform” the right emotions. Her own view is that prospective volunteers need to demonstrate to the selection team that they will be able to convince callers that their emotional performances are genuine. She additionally introduces a tension with the giving of emotion and whether it is a matter of organisational expectation or an expression of volunteers’ authenticity (examined in greater detail in the following section 6.4):

There were indications from the very beginning that we would need to support people through the use of our emotions. The interview highlighted the importance of emotions and it became quite clear, very early on, that we would need to... I guess perform emotions. I don’t know if that’s the right way to say it, because it isn’t that those performances aren’t real or aren’t our genuine felt emotions. What I mean is, while you’re on the phone, you have to basically be what the caller needs you to be. Most callers need the same sort of thing from you, although of course you do cater yourself to each caller. But mostly, we have to seem like we really care, like we’re really empathetic, and we have to be convincing. Sometimes our reactions aren’t a true reflection of how we feel, often they are, but sometimes they’re not. The interview was about assessing our ability to do that, to give the right emotions even when we don’t feel them [Imogen, 17 years, branch 3]

Commenting on the interview techniques utilised by Helpline, ‘Tess’, similarly highlighted ‘assessment’ as a central aspect of the selection process. However, rather than viewing this as a test of her ability to perform the correct emotional display, she saw it as a test of her capacity to ‘cope’ with the emotional demands of the role. She indicates that one’s suitability is determined by their ‘emotional resilience’:

If I think back to the interview, some of the questions were things like ‘think back to a point in your life when you felt at your lowest, how did you manage that situation and how will that experience help with this role?’. I think questions like that are designed to reveal how resilient somebody is. During the recruitment process, they don’t accept everybody, they will only accept those who show that they will be able to cope emotionally. So, I think it’s actually quite tough to become a volunteer. I think they ask things like that because they can reveal a lot about the individual. Sometimes

people realise that this type of work isn't really for them. It's not the type of role that should be entered into without careful consideration [Tess, 3 years, branch 1]

Another interviewee, 'Caitlyn', similarly suggests that a person's ability to "quickly recover" from the emotional challenges that some interactions present is salient. She frames this capacity to cope with the reality of death as, requiring a certain kind of expertise:

During the interview process, you go through an assessment that helps the assessors to decide whether or not you are capable... It's a bit like role play, they set up a series of hypothetical calls with an experienced member of the selection team for the purpose of emulating a real-life call. The experienced volunteer gives you a hard time, maybe shouts and swears at you, or presents a really challenging scenario and it basically tests how you would handle and respond while under pressure. If you weren't the calibre of person that could take it and quickly recover, then that would be obvious and they would be telling you. If you're not someone who is able to cope with someone who is literally taking their own life while speaking to you, if you don't have those skills, you should probably be questioning whether the role is right for you anyway [Caitlyn, 1 year, branch 3]

"Calibre" was a recurring concept in the conversations about Helpline's recruitment and selection process. This was indicated in the comments of 'Dale' regarding the rejection of free labour in the case where a prospective volunteer fails to demonstrate their emotional suitability:

If, throughout the recruitment process, a volunteer is perceived to be lacking what it takes to be a successful volunteer, perhaps they are not ready, emotionally, then they will fail the test and be considered unsuitable of fulfilling duties to the organisation's standards. The idea that a voluntary organisation would turn people away, people willing to offer their free time and resources, is a bit ludicrous but that's how seriously we take someone's suitability [Dale, 1 year, branch 5]

The empirical extracts presented in this section expose the inherent organisational requirement placed upon volunteers to deliver the 'correct emotional display' to callers. Data reveal that effective call handling is closely associated with the need for volunteers to 'live up to' strict organisational standards. The role of 'assessment' in the recruitment and selection process has been highlighted and volunteers interpret this as gauge of a) the volunteer's suitability to perform and b) the volunteer's capacity to cope with the emotional demands of the role. The training and selection process appear to prescribe some limits on volunteer behaviour by 'weeding out' those who are not suitable for the role. The notion of emotional resilience not only provides insight into the ways that volunteers conceptualise working in a 'crisis' environment, but it also contributes to the way that volunteers view their Helpline work as distinct from other types of volunteering (research questions one and two). In the following section, the idea of emotion management as organisational prescription is further

developed through empirical accounts of Helpline's training and induction processes.

6.3.2 Training and induction

Many volunteers indicated that Helpline's training programme is another organisational procedure that perpetuates the demand for volunteers' emotions and suitable emotional displays. During interviews, volunteers indicated that across the two phases of Helpline's training (outlined in chapter four), they were instructed to respond to the perceived feelings of callers in a manner that upholds the values of the organisation. The case of 'Imogen' is illustrative here. Referring to the way that tone of voice is regulated and modified in line with organisational expectations; she explains how she was taught to suppress her own authentic feelings in order to appear "neutral":

The training teaches you how to demonstrate empathy and a part of that is keeping your tone of voice appropriate. We're actually taught the appropriate way to sound. If a caller is telling you something that you totally disagree with, you can't allow that to come across. I have to stay neutral and keep my own counsel, and that's not always easy. You have to stay calm and encourage the caller to be calm too. I am there to listen to them, not to judge them. In my head I might [judge], but you can't hear that in my voice because I've been taught not to show my true feelings. As far as the caller is concerned, I'm completely impartial (Imogen, 17 years, branch 3)

'Amanda' similarly emphasised the importance of volunteers refining their tone of voice, in her account though, she refers to the need to appear more "approachable" to callers. She indicates that this is an extended aspect of "mastering" the correct emotional display and believes that the way things are said to callers are just as important as what is said:

Part of establishing the right environment for a successful interaction between the caller and the volunteer is not just what we say, but how we say it. Of course, we have to say the right things in accordance with [Helpline's] rules and values, but actually, if you're not firstly making callers feel safe and comfortable, then anything you say is redundant. So, the way you say things and the tone you use is really important. The training teaches volunteers how to say things. You must try and be approachable, so speaking in a slightly softer voice to make people feel comfortable. We want them to open up and talk to us about stuff that they might find difficult and so, we have to be aware of how we can best facilitate that [Amanda, 19 years, branch 1]

In the above extract, 'Amanda', echoes the findings from the previous chapter (chapter 5) that constructs Helpline's core values as a set of organisational rules that control volunteer behaviour. This observation was supported by 'Maddy', who, when reflecting on her training that occurred more than ten years ago, explains how those values were "drummed into" new

volunteers. The promotion and repetition of Helpline's values during the training indicates that their enactment is a fundamental requirement of the role that volunteers must discern:

Giving empathy, acting in a non-judgmental way and offering complete confidentiality are the most important and enduring aspects of the work... those core values that dictate how we carry out our work were really drummed into us during the training [Maddy, 10 years, branch 2]

In the following extract, 'Martha' articulates the extent to which Helpline's core values are tied up in organisational expectations. She distinguishes between sympathy and empathy by using a metaphor to describe the caller, their circumstances and how volunteers evoke empathy. She indicates the importance of nuance where service delivery is concerned; claiming that, unlike sympathy, empathy allows volunteers to "feel the pain" of callers because they have placed themselves in a position to "suffer their darkness":

The word we use is empathy, which is a step ahead from sympathy. We are taught how to be empathic not sympathetic and it's an important distinction. Sympathy is being sorry to hear something, whereas empathy is getting into the emotions and into the head of someone. It is a very clever idea within [Helpline]. During the training, we were taught to think about our calls as a hole in the ground, and the man standing at the bottom of the hole is our caller. If we stand at the top of the hole, looking down at the caller, we might say, 'it must be very dark down there', that is an example of sympathy. With empathy, we would get a stepladder, which is symbolic of all of our values and the skills and techniques that we have learnt, and we go down into the hole with the caller. That way, you're both at the same height, and you're both tiny, and instead of saying 'it must be dark down there', you can say 'it's dark down here isn't it'. That's the difference. We get down into that position with the caller. That is why the work is emotionally challenging, because now you are in a position where you are suffering the darkness with the other person [Martha, 15 years, branch 3]

Data suggest that Helpline's core values are the primary pillars which underpin the Helpline service and behest volunteer etiquette. Despite them being highly respected by volunteers, there is no avoiding that they appear to operate as strict organisational rules that dictate volunteer behaviour. They compel volunteers to 'give' emotions such as empathy (regardless of whether they genuinely feel them) while simultaneously requiring them to withhold and omit their own personal views and norms (with regards what they consider acceptable or appropriate). The emotions of volunteers are effectively a commodity that, to some extent, is undeniably, controlled by the organisation.

6.3.3 Emotion regulation

As demonstrated in the above accounts, a central aspect of delivering the correct emotional display to callers involves “being what the caller needs you to be” (p. 114). This means, not only being approachable but being empathetic in a way that allows volunteers to “feel the pain” of callers and “suffer their darkness”. A contrast in the data however, reveals the equal importance (as stipulated by the organisation) of creating and maintaining an emotional distance. The need for ‘emotional distance’ is taken seriously by the organisation as demonstrated in ‘Malvin’s’ account where he formulates this contradiction as volunteers needing to be two separate people: their authentic selves outside of the organisation and a “persona” within the confines of the Helpline role:

It's hard because it's about achieving an environment that the caller feels comfortable with. That requires volunteers to put themselves in their callers' shoes, to imagine what it must be like for them. But, achieving that right environment also requires volunteers to create a distance between themselves and the caller. I think it helps that we use pseudonyms. It's not just a different name, it's almost like a persona. When I'm here, I need to not be me. Outside I'm Mick, and Mick has a partner and he has preferences and has political views and so on. Malvin doesn't have any of those things and that's important for maintaining distance. When I am here, I'm really just empathy, I'm almost not a real person. I can listen to a caller and hear some awful stuff, but as soon as I leave here, I am Mick again and I need to be able to leave all of that awful stuff behind. You have to be able to emotionally detach because otherwise it would drive you nuts. I liken it to a doctor, as a doctor you have to care about people and you have to fundamentally want to help people, but you can't be bothered every time a patient dies, because your patients will die, a certain percentage of them will. You have to get used to that and let it go. With [Helpline], you need to be emotionally involved in the sense that you want to help these people, but once that call is over, you have to be able to let it go. You have to be able to detach, because I don't think you could do it otherwise [Malvin, 1 year, branch 3]

Whereas some volunteers, like ‘Malvin’, claimed that the use of pseudonyms helped them to maintain an emotional distance, others referred to ‘masks’ and ‘hats’ as a way of emphasising the importance of distance and professionalism:

I see [Helpline] as just another kind of professional role, and if I go in and do a job, I do it with my professional mask in place. I think I am somebody who can be deeply empathetic, and callers probably think I am almost like a best friend. That is what volunteers are supposed to do, build that kind of connection. I express and I feel empathy, I try my best to understand how it must feel to be in that situation, even if it's deeply different from my own. I am able to put on hold any of my own belief systems, whether they are religious moral or political. And I try and be their buddy for the duration of the call. But only for the duration of the call. I am just the [Helpline] volunteer that happened to pick up the phone for that caller so it's important that I don't get overly invested and that I treat all callers the same. That distance that we create is important (Elise, 1 year, branch 2)

‘Patrick’ explains how the training taught him strategies to balance the contradiction of ‘true empathy’ with ‘emotional distance’:

The purpose of the training was to teach volunteers how to limit their role and responsibility. It focussed on teaching volunteers how to prevent themselves from becoming too emotionally involved in their calls. It was about preventing volunteers from being drawn into adopting a problem solving or rescuing approach. One way to do this is by positioning yourself as being with the caller in the moment of the call, but not beyond it [Patrick, 5 years, branch 1]

This section on emotion regulation sheds light on the importance placed upon volunteers to marry their empathic care with emotional distance. It has examined, through the extracts presented, some of the techniques that the organisation teaches volunteers to ensure they are giving the ‘perfect amount’ of emotion.

6.3.4 Section summary

The ‘emotion management as organisational prescription’ sub-theme presented above, reveals the inherent organisational requirement placed upon volunteers to deliver the ‘correct emotional display’. It highlights how the central role of Helpline’s values are utilised as a form of control that prescribes limits on volunteer behaviour. This section has examined the manifold ways in which the emotion work of volunteers is guided by administrative policy, organisational values and socially dictated emotion rules; particularly through the recruitment and selection and the training and induction practices. Furthermore, it captures the organisational desire for volunteers to deliver emotion work while regulating their own emotional reactions through various emotion management techniques.

This above theme begins to highlight the tension and conflict between emotion management as organisational prescription and conversely, emotion management as an expression of volunteers’ authenticity. This tension (as will be revealed in the remainder of this thesis) has become a much more prominent issue for volunteers as they attempt to grapple with the challenges that the introduction of organisational change throws up. It reinforces the idea (from organisational studies) that organisations are not abstract structures and processes; that they are in many ways, a reflection of those individuals who inhabit the organisation at any given time. In the following section, I will examine how volunteers construct their emotion work as an expression of their own authenticity before delving into this inherent tension in chapter seven.

6.4 Emotion management as an expression of authenticity

The forementioned sub-theme that describes the work of volunteers as ‘emotion management as organisational prescription’ is a sharp distinction from volunteers’ second conceptualisations of their work as ‘emotion management as an expression of authenticity’. This current sub-theme captures the way that volunteers freely give their emotions to callers because it reflects the type of people that they are. Volunteers associated the ‘giving’ of their emotions with being intrinsically connected with some of the best and most rewarding aspects of the role. In this section of the chapter, extracts will demonstrate how the ‘giving’ of volunteers’ emotions, while still a demanding and arduous undertaking, provides a sense of meaning in volunteers’ lives that in turn, enhances the volunteer experience; restores their commitment and affirms their identities. Moreover, this section will examine how volunteers seek the positive outcomes of emotion work, including, a sense of meaning and purpose, as a way of offsetting some of its negative consequences.

6.4.1 Building a connection

Volunteers revealed that a central part of creating the correct environment wherein successful interactions can be nurtured rests upon the ability of volunteers to build a ‘connection’ with their callers (see section 6.2 and 6.3). Several volunteers indicated that the giving of their authentic emotions is facilitated by this connection. Building a ‘connection’ was defined by volunteers as developing a close, meaningful, trusting and significant relationship that enables callers to feel safe and supported when discussing their emotional concerns:

The first thing we need to do when we get on a call is build a connection. That’s essential with all of our calls as it’s the basis of effective call-handling. That in itself can be hard work. Some calls require more effort to establish that connection, but its fundamental [Mandy, 4 years, branch 4]

‘Connection’ was positioned as a genuine and legitimate aspiration for volunteers because as one volunteer indicated, it is necessary for successfully “moving the caller on” from their current distressed state or mindset. In a discussion about improving caller outcomes, one former branch Director, ‘Charlotte’, details the intricacies of building a connection:

A connection between me and the caller is absolutely necessary. Volunteers learn how to build that connection, firstly in the training and then through practice on the frontline. You must implement all of those core values, you must be empathetic, you must say the right thing, not push the caller too much, respect their boundaries, give your emotions, actively listen, limit what you disclose, all whilst trying to figure out what the caller needs from you without actually asking directly. That’s how you build

a connection and only then, are you able to effectively support the caller [Charlotte, 6 years, branch 4]

Another interviewee, 'Nate', explained that he always hopes to build a genuine connection with his callers because, in his view, it is an indication of success:

I think it's really difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of the service that we provide. It's difficult to quantify how many people we help. It's difficult even to conceptualise what help means. Help looks different for everyone, in the same way that effective support looks different for everyone because everyone's circumstances are different. Building a connection is one way that we can measure whether the call has been valuable for the caller. Connection is a fundamental human need, if we've managed to achieve that, in my mind, we've been successful [Nate, 2 years, branch 5]

The above accounts reveal the multifaceted process that is involved in building a connection; volunteers must effectively implement the various skills and techniques that they are taught throughout the training and induction if they are to establish the necessary rapport with callers. The accounts demonstrate the legitimate aspiration of volunteers to build a connection that is genuine and authentic. In the following section, I will depict, through relevant data extracts, the sophisticated emotion work that volunteers undertake to deepen this connection.

6.4.2 Giving self

'Giving self' is a concept that was developed from many interviewee transcripts that variously described the process of the caller-volunteer interaction as: 'an investment'; 'giving everything you have'; 'offering sincere empathy'; 'creating an emotional attachment' and 'developing an intimate closeness'. One volunteer described the process of 'giving self' as "freely offering everything you have, both emotionally and intellectually, to the caller" [Alana, 3 years]. Giving self ultimately captures the way volunteers firstly, offer their own raw and fundamental emotions to callers and secondly, how they immerse themselves entirely in their voluntary roles. In the extracts presented here, volunteers construct the reality of their membership as, on the one hand, deeply intense and emotionally challenging and on the other hand, personally profound and meaningful. In this section, we are given a sense of how the 'giving' of emotions is associated with being intrinsically connected to some of the best and most rewarding aspects of the role.

Giving self was conceptualised as affording volunteers a sense of personal meaning and a sense of perspective. 'Patricia' is an illustrative case here; she explains how a sense of

shared experience and common humanity facilitates a deep emotional connection with her callers:

Speaking to people who are desperately distressed, being there for them and building a connection with them, that to me, is what is important in life. It's not only my purpose here [in Helpline] but it's my purpose in life. We are all vulnerable and we are all one wrong decision away from utter despair or destitution. Many of us [volunteers] have already been there. I'm only here doing this job because I have experienced that utter sense of helplessness and I got to a point where I needed help. That shared understanding and experience, that can be really comforting for me because it's a reminder of where I was and for the caller, it offers a sense of hope [Patricia, 21 years, branch 4]

'Jada' similarly refers to her own lived experience as the reason that she feels able to 'give self'. She describes the process as a deeply personal and arduous endeavour but indicates that helping people is a 'privilege' that can be personally healing; which in turn restores a sense of meaning in her life:

When you give everything you possibly can to the caller, it's extraordinarily tough. It's tough because it's so personal. We can only give ourselves in that way because of the things we've experienced ourselves. We do it though, because we want to and it truly is a privilege. Being able to sit alongside these people, having them allow me to sit alongside them in their darkest and lowest moments really is a privilege. It allows me to be the person I am; empathic and deeply caring. It's incredibly special. It's actually been very healing for me and to be able to give what I once received really gives me a sense of wholeness (Jada, 13 years, branch 4)

'Kacey' explains the process of giving self as "attempting to feel what the caller feels", which she says, is achieved by firstly, imagining herself in the caller's reality and secondly, "by getting into their heads and emotions". She goes on to describe the physical change in the demeanour of volunteers when they are in the process of 'giving self':

I find a large number of calls emotionally challenging because you really do invest yourself in them and you get very connected. Interestingly enough, you can tell when somebody is on a really hard call from their body language. They tend to be hunched up over their phone and you can see that they are truly in that space with the caller. Giving everything they have to that caller. I think that it would be really unusual for you not to feel emotionally drained at the end of that regardless of the outcome. The outcome of some of our calls is a very long period of silence, where, at some point, you inevitably have to hang up. Quite often, a colleague will have to help you hang up because once you have disconnected the call, you have lost them and that can be difficult to come to terms with. Of course, we are emotionally attached to some callers and I think, certainly with myself, there is one or two calls that I will carry with me forever, not in a way that it doesn't allow me to function but because they hit a chord in some way (Kacey, 12 years, branch 4)

‘Patricia’ similarly associates a change in body language with “complete absorption” into the lives of callers. She claims that body language that is “hunched over” represents an attempt to get physically closer to the caller. She speaks of having “nothing left over”, in an emotional sense, after taking such calls and explains that these calls, are often some of the “the best and most rewarding ones”:

Really, all of the calls are emotionally challenging in some way, even the ones that you would consider a ‘good’ call, they can still be incredibly hard, emotional work. In fact, those tough calls are often the best and most rewarding ones. You can tell if somebody has that kind of call because they move closer to the phone and they get down, everybody sort-of hunkers in. Everything you have is with that caller, or attempting to be with that caller, because that’s what it is really, it is being alongside that person, not in a physical sense obviously, but that sort of human-to-human thing, that is what [Helpline] do, in the guts of it. That’s what gives us purpose and meaning. Very often, if there has been a call that has been that hard, the volunteer may not take another call for the rest of that duty because they haven’t got anything left over, nothing spare, everything that they had has gone to the person on the end of the phone [Patricia, 21 years, branch 4]

Volunteers’ accounts of ‘connection’ and ‘giving self’ often became somewhat spiritual and several volunteers described the experience as a ‘privilege’ or a ‘gift’. A few volunteer interviewees spoke of the “profoundness” of, as one interviewee put it, “giving desperate people a space where they could feel confirmed as significant human beings”:

What sticks out for me is just how privileged we are to have somebody who is prepared to open up and talk to us about their deepest fears. There are one or two callers that I can remember for whom, the fact that I had been there, not because it was me, but because I had happened to take that call, I was able to be what they needed. I was there to understand what they were telling me and also, what they weren’t saying. To be on the phone to someone for an hour or more, and to have them talk about the picture in their head of going to the bridge and sitting on the bridge and being prepared to jump. That was how they were feeling about their life. For them to accept the picture that I was sitting beside them on that bridge where we were having a conversation. Their acceptance of my support meant that they weren’t so alone in that painful place and that’s what makes the connection genuine. We can’t change the caller’s situation, but we can sit beside them while they talk about it. One of my fellow volunteers calls it ‘sitting with the broken’ and honestly it is a privilege. So yes, we use our emotions and we make ourselves vulnerable and we try to feel what they are feeling, but then, when you come off the phone and you realise that for that moment, for that hour, you were sitting beside somebody who had allowed nobody else to sit beside them, who had told you things that they could barely even tell themselves. It’s like you’ve made a safe space for this person, where they have never felt safe before and although they have gone away with exactly what they came with, you have still given them something so profound. The fact that you have shared it as well, it really is such a profound and special thing. It’s like a little miracle working when it happens (Rena, 47 years, branch 1)

6.4.3 Identity construction

The above extracts reveal that the personal subjective experience of volunteering is a deeply meaningful one in the hearts and minds of volunteers. The data was replete with the sense that, volunteers derived a sense of meaning and identity from their membership to Helpline. ‘Malvin’, for example, describes how Helpline fulfilled a sense of meaning in his life after experiencing a sense of meaninglessness prior to his membership:

For me, the reason I work at [Helpline] is because it gives me a meaning in life. Once upon a time, I used to work in a call centre, full-time, and I would go to work and do my shift and I'd come home and not do much once I got home. My life... I had everything that I needed, but I didn't feel like I was contributing to the world. Joining [Helpline] coincided with me jacking in that job and training in a different area. To me, making a contribution to society and to the world is really important. I don't mean this in a boastful way, but I think that because I am a [Helpline] volunteer, the world is a better place. If I can just help one person to have a better life, then I feel like my life has been worthwhile. If I never helped anybody, and never did any good in the world, then to me, my life would be meaningless, there wouldn't be any meaning. Also, because I have experienced some hardships and some mental health problems, a question that has been at the front of my mind previously, is: why am I alive and what is the point? That's why I do it, I do it because I want to make the world a better place, because otherwise, what is the point? [Malvin, 1 year, branch 3]

‘Cali’ is an example of someone who experiences her voluntary activity as a source of identity. For her, the sense of identity that she acquires through Helpline deeply informs the understanding she has of herself. She describes the prospect of leaving the organisation as unimaginable, indicating that her sense of self would not remain intact if she ceased volunteering:

For many who work here, they've grown an emotional attachment to it and get a sort of identity from it. This goes for myself as well, I have been a [Helpline] volunteer for a long time now, and I don't think I could stop. It is my identity, and I don't see myself stopping my work here. I can't imagine doing anything else instead, so it definitely is a big part of how I see myself now. I just can't imagine any reason that would bring it to an end, something would have to bring it to an end for me, something out of my control and out of my hands. I would need to be physically told that I cannot do it anymore, and even then, I would probably argue [Cali, 30 years, branch 3]

Another volunteer, ‘Rena’, similarly attaches significance and meaning to her volunteering; characterising it as “a way of life” and “a part of her”. She, similarly to ‘Cali’, does not envision herself leaving Helpline and jokes that she will likely remain with the organisation “until I pop my clogs”:

I had to wait a long time to get my foot in the door here, perhaps even a year or more. It's because, at that time, when I applied, they had so many people wanting to be a volunteer. Anyway, I'm glad that I waited it out and didn't seek an alternative opportunity because it has become a way of life to be quite honest. It has become a part of me, I shall probably

be here until I pop my clogs, it's like another family, it's an extended family. I'm not sure any other organisation would have provided me with such meaning in life [Rena, 47 years, branch 1].

Some regard their volunteer work as such an important part of their lives that it becomes central to their self-perceptions, virtually defining who they are. 'Sandra', for example, discusses her experience of feeling forced to leave Helpline in order to care for her mother but comments that this left a "void" in her life. Her reinstatement consequently enabled her to express her authentic self as indicated in her assertion that her return left her feeling back to her "normal self":

I have a lot going on in my personal life, my mum is unwell, and so, I care for her. I did leave [Helpline] briefly, I had to due to my caring responsibilities, but I just missed it so much, I felt incomplete in a way. Anyway, the Director said they would reinstate me and I was just so glad to be back because it's really a part of my identity and now, that void that I experienced before has been filled again and I'm back to my normal self [Sandra, 8 years, branch 2]

The ability to express one's authentic self was also emphasised by 'Alesha' who explains how her perspective on life and death has changed as a result of her membership:

It does become a part of you. It moves into your outside life, the skills that you learn here, they become so ingrained that you use them in your outside life. It starts to form the way that you are and how you approach issues and how you deal with matters of life and death. Working here, it really shapes you into a certain type of person. How I conduct myself here reflects who I truly am as a person [Alesha, 2 years, branch 5]

The Helpline role, for some volunteers, carries greater significance than it does for others. The above extracts are some examples that shine a light on the connection and emotional attachment that many volunteers articulated in relation to their roles. 'Rachel' is another illustrative case here, she highlights the salience of her Helpline role by comparing it to the other volunteering roles that she is involved in. She claims that while volunteering is a part of her personal "culture", her volunteering at Helpline specifically, is distinctive and particularly pertinent to her self-concept:

I just have a culture of voluntary work within me I think, on a personal level I mean. I do other things that might be considered moral and decent in the community, but I don't get as much back from it as I perhaps do from this. I have a culture of volunteering within me but there certainly is something very special about this particular role. My work here is different to the other things that I am involved in and I think perhaps, this better reflects what, and who, I am [Rachel, 23 years, branch 1]

Interestingly, some volunteers made a distinction regarding the target of their commitment. 'Ivan' suggests that it is the voluntary activity rather than the voluntary organisation that he is

committed to; suggesting that his sense of identity is shaped by the role and the work he carries out rather than by the wider organisation:

It's just who I am. I don't think it's [Helpline] as such, but helping people is absolutely a part of my identity. That part of my identity runs deep, it's what I did when I was a social worker and it is what I now do in my work with Cruse. Yes, it is absolutely how I see myself, I'm just that sort of person. Don't get me wrong I'm not a saint, but nevertheless, I am happy doing this work with [Helpline] and I see it as a part of myself [Ivan, 5 years, branch 2].

The above extracts demonstrate how the volunteer identity, for many volunteers, becomes a way to enact their personal values which in turn, enables them to maintain an important self-image. This section has highlighted the intricate and nuanced way that meaning and identity stand in a dialectical relationship. Furthermore, it posits that the *type* of activity that volunteers engage with depends to a considerable extent, on their personal values which in turn, influences the way that volunteers feel about the organisation, their roles within it and themselves.

6.4.4 The dilemma of authenticity

Volunteers explained that calls, while deeply rewarding, can be difficult to deal with emotionally and a significant number of volunteers spoke about the need to process them. 'Tess' is an illustrative example here and she highlights some of the physical consequences that can impact volunteers, such as exhaustion and disturbed sleep. She begins by describing the need to process the calls wherein volunteers have managed to create an intimate closeness to their callers. She states:

It is absolutely exhausting, definitely not for the faint hearted. When I get back from my shift at about 23:45, I feel so drained but I can't go to bed, because it is going around in your mind, and you probably get to bed around 01:00 and I've noticed that I don't ever sleep as well after I have done a [Helpline] shift as when I haven't done one. I think it's just because you give so much of yourself, especially on difficult calls. I don't think that it is surprising, given what we hear, but it means that often, after your shift, you do still have a way to go to process the calls. Whilst on the phone, you really have to be in the calls, you can't afford to have concentration lapses, you have to be absolutely on the ball (Tess, 3 years, branch 1)

There was an awareness among volunteers that getting 'too close' could have an adverse effect; one volunteer highlighted this challenge in her statement: "the very connection that we try so hard to build on the call can also be personally damaging". This volunteer compares her role to a counsellor, indicating that the exposure to the raw emotional pain of callers can put volunteers at risk of energy depletion and burnout:

We really have no choice but to try to maintain some kind of distance from our callers and although that's a really difficult thing to actually do, If we didn't, their problems would become our problems in a much bigger way than it already does. That wouldn't be good for someone like me who tends to take on people's problems. The service we provide isn't too dissimilar from that of counsellors really, and although we are not counsellors, some of the things we hear can have a similar effect. There's a very real worry that if we don't distance ourselves, we could experience burnout or compassion fatigue. That's a really big concern for the organisation because that would likely result in us walking away from our posts permanently [Marissa, 4 years, branch 5]

Talking of the need to process calls, volunteers frequently mentioned Helpline's support function and highlighted the role of mutualism that is built into this system. 'Mariah' explains the reliance and dependence of volunteers upon one another which, while highly valuable, also increases workplace pressure:

Firstly, you have your colleague on the shift, they are your first port of call for support, then you have the duty leader who is also a volunteer but isn't in branch with you, you call them if you are struggling after a call or if you need additional support to process something... The support system is pretty good and it's important that it's good as well because we are so bound by confidentiality, we can't talk to anybody else about any of our calls or the burden they sometimes leave on us. You have to be able to disconnect and the support system gives you the opportunity to offload. It's a unique system because it's basically like being a [Helpline] volunteer to the [Helpline] volunteer. We, fellow volunteers, take that support function on though. As the ones on the front-line, we know how necessary that support is for volunteers so we don't mind doing it, but it is another layer of emotional work you know? The caller offloads their distress to you, you offload your distress to the leader who is a volunteer, if the leader finds it difficult, they offload it to the branch director who is also a volunteer. I guess it weakens the distress a little bit, its diluted through each layer of offloading. But ultimately, the buck always stops with a volunteer (Mariah, 2 years, branch 5)

6.4.5 Summary

The narrative presented in this second empirical chapter highlights the dualism between volunteers' understandings of their roles as a matter of organisational prescription or as, an expression of volunteers' authenticity. Furthermore, this chapter develops the picture created in chapter five of Helpline as a complex and unique organisation. Importantly, the following chapter examines the disruption of volunteers' conceptualisations of (and experiences with) Helpline as a result of organisational change. It reveals that volunteers feel conflicted in their loyalties to this 'unique organisation' as management control over the service offering, and volunteers more broadly, strengthens which in turn, inhibits authenticity. Against the backdrop of increasingly prescriptive rules that are ascribed by the organisation, volunteers embark upon a fight for authenticity.

Chapter Seven: Empirical Findings (part three)

Professionalisation as Loss

7.1 Introduction

This final empirical chapter presents findings related to the third research question outlined in chapter 3, namely: ‘How are externally driven organisational changes affecting volunteers’ experiences and in what ways is resistance demonstrated?’. In this chapter, I bring together the findings from chapters five and six by making connections to this current chapter. This is achieved by examining how organisational change is, in volunteers’ minds, affecting the uniqueness of Helpline (chapter 5) and provoking a fight for authenticity among volunteers (chapter 6). The analytic process, outlined in chapter four, generated the third and final overarching theme: ‘professionalisation as loss’. This theme captured, firstly, volunteers’ (mostly) negative perceptions of professionalisation and secondly, a strong sense of loss among volunteers in relation to both: Helpline’s uniqueness and volunteers’ sense of belonging, authenticity and identity.

Nested underneath the overarching theme, ‘professionalisation as loss’, are three sub-themes, they include: ‘centralised control or volunteer-led?’, ‘homogenous or distinct?’ and ‘hopeless or helpful?’. These sub-themes have been framed as questions to capture the severe dichotomy set up in volunteers’ narratives that positions organisational change as the antithesis of the previous (and mostly preferred) way of working. In other words, within volunteers’ narratives, there appears to be no neutral, middle ground between being: volunteer-led or centralised; homogenous or distinct nor hopeless or helpful. Within the presentation of each of these sub-themes, I introduce a specific organisational change to demonstrate the disruption to organisational values and volunteers’ authenticity. Notably, I examine how volunteers try to make sense of these cherished attributes in light of new organisational demands.

The first sub-theme, ‘centralised control or volunteer-led?’, examines volunteers’ responses to structural change, which specifically, is positioned as representing the removal of the volunteer-led philosophy that previously empowered volunteers to take responsibility over the organisation’s direction, strategy and daily operational activities (section 5.2). Within this, I present the introduction of Helpline’s mentoring scheme as one specific change that, according to volunteers, is challenging Helpline’s uniqueness and volunteers’

authenticity. The second sub-theme, ‘homogenous or distinct?’, captures volunteers’ understandings of professionalisation as compromising Helpline’s core values (5.3). This sub-theme will examine how the value alignment (between volunteers and Helpline) is being disrupted by the introduction of new organisational procedures that are perceived as incompatible and contradictory. I present the introduction of the safeguarding policy as one specific change that appears to contradict the core values of the organisation the most and blurs the distinction between the purpose of a statutory organisation and voluntary organisation. The third sub-theme, ‘hopeless or helpful?’, reflects volunteers’ fight for authenticity (section 6.4) in light of professionalisation prescribing new rules upon service delivery. I present the introduction of technological change as changing the way that volunteers carry out their work and interact with service users.

7.2 Review of organisational changes

Data revealed that volunteers unanimously agreed that Helpline was undergoing a process of ‘professionalisation’ in response to external changes and pressures. Volunteers described professionalisation as representing a: ‘more formal’, ‘more centralised’ and ‘more bureaucratic’ way of working. Volunteers used a range of synonymous and interchangeable concepts to describe the process of professionalisation, they included, becoming ‘business-like’, ‘corporate’ and ‘formal’. These conceptualisations reflect the different types of organisational change that were underway at the time of data collection. For example, some changes were structural, others were policies that might be viewed as ethical or based on established good practice (safeguarding) and others were managerialist in nature and imported from other sectors (mentoring, technological change). Below is a table that depicts the different types of organisational change:

	Specific organisational change	Intention of change from organisational perspective	What it looked like pre-change	What it looks like post-change
1	Safeguarding policy	To protect the safety of vulnerable children and adults. A policy that is based on established ‘good practice’.	Absolute caller confidentiality.	Intervention of a safeguarding officer where necessary. Volunteers required to obtain callers’ information if a safeguarding concern is presented.

	Specific organisational change	Intention of change from organisational perspective	What it looked like pre-change	What it looks like post-change
	(Ethical change based on good practice)	An ethical framework to guide volunteers.	Entirely non-judgemental service.	Volunteers need to assess whether callers can make their own decisions.
2	Mentoring (Managerialist change)	To achieve consistency in service provision across all branches. A supportive function for volunteer development.	Volunteers were largely autonomous and had control over their own work and delivery of empathy and emotion.	Greater ‘surveillance’ and monitoring.
		To demonstrate that ‘quality control’ is taken seriously.	Volunteers’ own lived experiences played a central role in interactions: Not suitable for scrutiny.	Mentors, who are also volunteers, accompany their colleagues during a shift and give feedback on their performance using a competency framework.
3	E-log system (Managerialist change)	Standardised the reporting method used across all branches. To enable the monitoring and reporting of caller outcomes.	Process of putting pen to paper was a ‘cathartic’ way for volunteers to offload calls.	An electronic database where volunteers log and report each of their calls using a pre-designed platform.
			Allowed volunteers to identify repeated caller issues and flag them as needing to be addressed.	Generates statistical information pertaining to the number of people that volunteers help or ‘save’.
4	Extended channels of communication (Managerialist change)	Accessible for greater proportion of the population e.g., young people	Contact was made through the telephone and via face-to-face appointment. Branches were the focus and the organisation was community-based and served its local population.	People can now reach out for support from volunteers through email and SMS. The organisation has emerged as a national function of support rather than local.
5	Restructure (structural change)	Consistency in service provision and improved cohesion. Greater control and accountability of local branches. To overcome the issue of implementing change.	Volunteer-led and run. The Central Charity and local branches operated independently link between them.	Still run predominantly by volunteers but decision making has been centralised.

Table 7. 1 Overview of Helpline’s organisational changes

7.3 Centralised control or volunteer-led?

One of the most prominent sub-themes generated from interviewees' accounts of how organisational change was affecting volunteers' experiences (research question three), was the sense of loss that they triggered in volunteers. In chapter 5, through relevant data extracts, I revealed how the "unique" role of volunteers, attributable to Helpline's "volunteer-led" organisational structure, reflected: high levels of volunteer participation and involvement; a sense of autonomy and a degree of input into organisational decision-making. Fundamental to volunteers' experiences of change and professionalisation, was what they perceived to be, a centralisation of power. To illustrate the changing power dynamic, several volunteers drew comparisons between the 'new' way of working (centrally controlled) and the 'old' way (volunteer-led). Overall, volunteers appeared attentive to an increased 'management presence'. This was demonstrated by one volunteer and former Branch Director who referred to the recent bureaucratisation as evidence that "management is now a much more purposeful activity where the organisation's aims, objectives and targets are "centrally defined with minimal space for negotiation" [Isaac, 13 years].

'Paul' described the process of centralisation as Central Charity (HQ where paid personnel are located) taking greater control of branches. His account emphasised how Helpline started to position itself as part of a collaborative national organisation at the expense of its former independent, local approach:

It was decided by Council that the structure of every branch should be changed so that the overall structure of [Helpline] would be tighter. The structure previously had been that we had Central Charity, and we had the branches, and there was really no formal link between them. Each of the branches operated pretty independently. This meant that the Central Charity, in the form of trustees, could make a decision but they couldn't really impose it on the branches. If branches rejected a decision, that was sort of the end of it because there was no way to formally impose it... We [branch 1] made a decision and decided to become a CIO [charitable incorporated organisation] and so we are our own charity and we control ourselves and our assets and expenditure, but we have a legal link to the Central Charity which means we have to obey their requirements, legally. All branches that decided to become a CIO, in an attempt to retain some of their autonomy, had to enter into a legal agreement with Central Charity. That way, the trustees have control of the whole organisation, including Central Charity and the branches. So, if a branch goes off the rails in some way, they can be held to account and brought back in line, but of course that's not necessarily a comfortable feeling for a branch [Paul, 17 years, branch 1]

In the above extract, 'Paul' raised an issue with Helpline's previous, relaxed approach to governance, that was, the difficulty of implementing national change. The indication here is that volunteers, prior to the organisational restructure, had too much power and control. He

suggested that by starting with the organisational restructure, subsequent national changes would be easier to implement, irrespective of any individual branch resistance. This interpretation was supported by another interviewee who stated that the structural change “occurred in order to overcome the challenge of self-governing branches acting independently” [Daniel, 5 years].

The replacement of local autonomy and control with a more bureaucratic system of governance was attributed by several volunteers, to the organisation’s changing accountability environment. Volunteers appeared to be aware of Helpline’s growing obligation to justify its activities to different stakeholders. ‘Sandra’ articulated this point by distinguishing between two organisational groups (volunteers and Central Charity) that each represent and prioritise the competing interests of different external stakeholders (callers and government, respectively):

I sometimes feel like we [volunteers and Central Charity] look at the purpose of the organisation from two completely different angles. At branch level, we are looking at it from the operational level and being on the phones to people. That is the most important thing, that is our absolute priority. Then, from the organisation’s side of things, I sometimes feel like things are promulgated from head office. They want us to do things, to justify ourselves to external bodies, so things like producing statistics. That is not for our benefit at branch level, we don’t care about that stuff. We see things from two completely different points of view... Quite often we [volunteers] feel like Central Charity are not trusting the volunteers on the ground with the whole picture. It’s almost as if they think we’re all a bit thick [Sandra, 8 years, branch 2]

The above extracts indicate that Helpline’s recently tightened governance has removed the decentralised decision making away from volunteers. Volunteers’ accounts of their perceived diminishing control were salient because they not only highlighted the marginalisation of volunteers’ voices, but also exposed the branch-level hostility towards Central Charity.

‘Rachel’ described the centralisation of control as the promotion of the ‘business model’ by Central Charity and suggested that such high-level changes were having a significant impact upon volunteers’ experiences due to the changing nature of their day to day, operational work. She raised concerns about the extent to which professionalisation was filtering down into daily operations and whether volunteers on the ground were invested in it. Moreover, she implied that the “grass-roots” decision-making approach (which volunteers cherished) was at risk of being undermined and threatened:

There has been huge changes in the big organisation [Central Charity], and that in turn, has affected how we [volunteers] function in our everyday work at branch-level. It’s been huge... At the highest level it has become much like a business and the skills that businesses use and the things that they have to do, have gotten into our organisation. As the person on the ground, I’m not entirely convinced that it has

improved. They say the business model improves the service that we give our callers, but what I think it does is improve our statistics and our ability to publicise and advertise what we do, in order to get more funding. I think though, that that can be, and has been in some respects, at a detriment to what actually goes on in the duty room. When I joined many years ago, we really felt that grassroots people were making the decisions, and now I don't feel that. I don't feel that at all. We've been isolated from all decision making. I think that what we do is still of a high quality, but I feel that it's too much coming from outside and it's not necessarily in the right direction [Rachel, 23 years, branch 1]

In 'Rachel's' above suggestion that the organisation had become business-like 'at the highest level', she gave the impression that 'business' is a dirty word and that business inputs were beginning to infiltrate "our organisation" at a detriment to the service offering. The use of possessive pronouns reinforce the strong sense of volunteer ownership over the branch (discussed in section 5.5). One long-serving volunteer 'Rena', revealed the extent of the shifting relations of power from the hands of volunteers to Central Charity and highlighted the dissatisfaction and disempowerment that many volunteers expressed during interviews:

We are so far away now from what we once were. We are very formal and everything we do is driven by this longer-term perspective that is apparently so important now. We no longer tackle the day-to-day operational activities in the same way because of this focus on the long term. The decision-making function has been taken away from the branches completely and centralised. Before, the volunteers in the branches would send their [branch] Director to Central Charity to have a discussion about how things were going and what needed to change moving forwards. Now, Branch Directors are told what is happening and they feed the information back to branches, so the direction of power and communication has changed. Some of them who now make the decisions for us, are people who have been brought in for their specific technical expertise. Decisions are sent down to us. So, the business side of things has really developed and volunteers, really, have no voice at all [Rena, 47 years, branch 1]

Like 'Rena', several other interviewees indicated dissatisfaction at being forced to navigate their way through, not only a reorganised relationship with Central Charity, but an entirely new way of communicating. 'Jada' for example, spoke of the irony of being refused the opportunity to provide input into what she claimed was "fundamentally a listening organisation run by volunteers". This feeling was reflected in the comments of 'Adele' who believed that "despite our loyalty", frontline volunteers had been placed at the periphery of the organisation's communication:

The bottom line is, we are trying to provide something that nobody else can and we surely, are the ones that know what is right and best for our callers rather than paid people who have never stepped foot in a [Helpline] branch. That makes sense, but instead, we've been placed outside of any communication. We now just get told what is happening and changing. We have no influence at all, despite our loyalty [Adele,

21 years, branch 4]

Similarly, ‘Philip’, repeated these concerns in his assertion that the centralisation of Helpline was resulting in the loss of the “amateur feeling” that had long contributed to Helpline’s sense of uniqueness due to the limited bureaucracy that such an approach permitted:

It has become professional and formalised which I guess is good in lots of ways but on the other hand, it’s not because you lose that sort of amateur feeling. That amateur feeling is actually a really unique thing because it allows us to support people in a way that the state or professional agencies aren’t able to. They aren’t amateur so there are lots of processes and procedures that must be adhered to and those formalities can feel intrusive for callers [Philip, 15 years, branch 4]

This “amateur feeling” is what many volunteers indicated they were worried about losing because as ‘Philip’ explained, it is this that makes the service unique. ‘Being amateur’, in many ways, was Helpline’s *raison d’être* and volunteers felt a close, emotional connection to it.

The above extracts shine a light on volunteers’ negative perceptions of centralisation and highlight the fear among volunteers about the risk that centralisation poses to Helpline’s volunteer-led philosophy, which was established (in section 5.2) as a compelling and cherished strength of the organisation. There is evident dissatisfaction and disempowerment communicated in the data extracts and this appeared to be due to the perceived threat to the “grass-roots”, “amateur feeling” that had previously characterised Helpline. At the time of data collection, Helpline was still formally considered a ‘volunteer-led’ organisation, this raises questions about whether the fear among volunteers that they might lose something cherished was reality or simply, perception. In the following section I examine the introduction of Helpline’s mentoring scheme as one specific change that, according to volunteers, challenges Helpline’s uniqueness and volunteers’ authenticity.

7.3.1 Mentoring scheme

In section 5.2, Helpline’s volunteer-led structure was recognised as empowering volunteers to take responsibility for the organisation’s direction, strategy and daily operational activities. The recent introduction of the mentoring scheme was one specific change that volunteers felt was contributing to firstly, the demise of that structure and secondly, the subsequent sense of disempowerment. Interviewees explained that trained mentors, who are also Helpline volunteers, accompany colleagues during a shift (annually) to give feedback on performance using a competency framework. Talking about the scheme, ‘Molly’ explained: “It is intended

to help the organisation achieve consistency in service provision and maintain high service standards”. One trained mentor ‘Billy’ compared Helpline’s mentoring scheme to the appraisal process found in paid employment, supporting the perception that Helpline was indeed, becoming ‘business-like’:

Every volunteer is mentored, it’s a bit like being at work and having a staff appraisal. So, there is a group of maybe 12 or 15 of us that have been trained as mentors, and we sit with a volunteer on their duty just to see how they are doing, to make sure that they are not self-disclosing, that they are not giving advice, that they are using the correct signposting and that type of thing. We basically want to ensure that everyone is behaving appropriately and in a way that is consistent with [Helpline’s] principles and values. There has been a lot of resentment because we have had people here for 20 years or more, and they haven’t been looked at for those 20 years and now they are, and they want to know why. Their idea is that we don’t trust them anymore [Billy, 10 years, branch 4]

Another volunteer, ‘Paul’, who was also a trained mentor similarly pointed to the resistance among volunteers regarding the scheme. He emphasised a distinction between the intention of the new scheme which was meant to be ‘supportive’ and the reality of it in volunteers’ eyes as “big brother-ish”:

The mentoring scheme is intended to be a supportive process but inevitably, people see it as a bit big brother-ish... we need to be able to demonstrate that the quality of our support is validated. I mean if you’re a hospital, you get the Care Quality Commission, but we don’t have anything like that, so we need to be able to demonstrate that every volunteer is checked by another volunteer and that’s the degree of quality checking. So that is the reason for that change, but it’s really not gone down well [Paul, 17 years, branch 1]

Several volunteers brought up ‘trust’ (or lack of) in relation to mentoring. There was a sense that the mentoring scheme was inhibiting the autonomy and control that volunteers had once had over their work (section 5.2). ‘Jada’ expressed her dissatisfaction over what she felt was the organisation rejecting her own lived experience as qualification enough to perform the role well:

We have always provided support in the way that we see fit. We’ve always adhered to the rules but until now, we’ve been trusted to get on with it, without interference. They’ve clearly decided that they don’t trust us anymore. It’s offensive that they’re relying on people who have been here for five minutes to assess those of us who have been here for years. I’ve got plenty of experience and I’ve been through a lot. I know how to support someone, I don’t need a degree in it [Jada, 13 years, branch 4]

‘Camila’ discussed her dissatisfaction at having her performance and empathy monitored. This appeared to relate to the way that volunteers ‘give self’ and the feeling is that the giving of emotions is an expression of volunteers’ authenticity which, in their minds, is not suitable

for scrutiny (see section 6.4). She attributed the increased surveillance to Central Charity's desire for greater control:

A lot of volunteers were up in arms about it. They felt that they couldn't be trusted to do it [provide support] properly. We do this work of our free will, we are invested in doing a good job and we've always done a good job because that's the type of people we are. We are empathetic and how we give empathy is not really up for inspection. A lot of volunteers have been open about their dislike of that. It's not just this branch, it is all branches. It has come down from somewhere up there at the Centre, they're power hungry. I think that it is insulting, and we really don't appreciate it [Camila, 4 years, branch 4]

Another volunteer 'Mandy' talked of her own experience of being mentored as difficult and highlighted how, for longer-serving colleagues, this difficulty was exacerbated:

The mentoring, that is another one that has been resisted. I haven't been involved in the mentoring to my relief. I have been mentored though and I have not found it easy, but then nobody enjoys feeling like they are being criticised. I'm sure there are positives as well as negatives, but it does feel like you are being criticised, so it is not an easy thing to do. I have only been here for four years, so for me, it is much easier. I have been mentored in the past with work and so I know what it is all about. But, for some of our very long-standing volunteers, they have been doing this for 30 or 40 years and so there is a feeling of 'why are you checking up on me'. There is also resistance to the idea that somebody who is newer will be checking up on the long-standing volunteers. Most will come out of it having passed with flying colours, because that is who we are and how we are trained but the thought that somebody might find a fault in you is a worry for everyone [Mandy, 4 years, branch 4]

Other volunteers were more reticent about their dislike of the scheme. 'Kacey' is illustrative here. She focussed on the ineffectiveness of mentoring, indicating that volunteers would likely alter their behaviour if they knew they were being observed:

I really dislike ongoing mentoring, it's how we quality control calls...I don't have a problem with that per se, I just think that it doesn't work. This organisation is shit at change management. We go for ages and ages and ages deciding that we are going to change something, and then all of a sudden, they want it done by the end of the month. When they brought ongoing mentoring in last year, it was a matter of weeks to get it sorted out. We had that amount of time to hold a meeting and tell a whole load of volunteers who had been here for 40 years that somebody is going to sit behind them and listen in and check what they are saying. Can you imagine? Can you imagine the reactions? It was awful. Actually, everything about it was wrong because they could have pitched it as a way of sharing good practice. But also, I don't think, if you are going to go against [Helpline's] rules, you are not going to do it when somebody is sat behind you listening to you. Another thing is that mentors can't hear what's being said by the caller. I think it really just ticks the box about how we do quality control, but we're not really doing quality control, not properly [Kacey, 12 years branch 4]

The extracts presented in relation to Helpline's new mentoring scheme exposed a contradiction between the organisation's narrative of the scheme as 'a supportive and

developmental’ process (expressed through mentor’s accounts) and volunteers’ narratives of it as ‘surveilling and scrutinising’. There were evident undertones in the extracts (particularly from mentors) pertaining to ‘quality control’, ‘consistency in service’ and ‘appropriate behaviour’; suggesting that the motivation for mentoring was in fact related to the demands of external stakeholders and the need to secure funding.

7.4 Homogeneous or distinct?

In chapter 5, through relevant data extracts, I revealed how Helpline had historically been driven by a core set of values, which in volunteers’ minds, made the organisation unique. In that chapter, volunteers’ narratives suggested that they needed to feel personally aligned to the organisational values to operationalise them. Also depicted, was the sense of belonging and commitment that volunteers derived from being members of this “value-driven” organisation (p. 105). In this current chapter, I show how professionalisation, in volunteers’ minds, challenged or compromised these unique values and depicts how the value alignment is being disrupted by the introduction of a new safeguarding policy (see table 7.1), which was perceived as being incompatible and contradictory with both, Helpline’s core values and volunteers’ personal values.

During interviews, volunteers were asked to talk about their feelings towards organisational change and many positioned them as Central Charity’s desire to ‘conform’. Conformity was inferred from statements such as: “we are trying to be like other organisations” and “the organisation is obsessed with emulating the practices of larger charities”. Conformity appeared to be discussed in one of two ways: The first related to pressures to conform with macro level changes (that is, the need to become more business-like), and the second, related to pressures to conform with other voluntary organisations (that is, the need to become more like other voluntary organisations). Volunteers considered both to be associated with the deliberate choices made by Central Charity to emulate the norms, values and ideologies of the wider sector. Herein, the dichotomy set up in volunteers’ narratives suggest that Helpline is either distinct from other organisations (preferred by volunteers) or homogeneous (supposedly preferred by Central Charity). The organisation’s desire to conform was presented as being at odds with volunteers’ desire to preserve Helpline’s uniqueness. One volunteer articulated this tension:

The problem is that Central Charity are obsessed with what other organisations are doing. It doesn’t really make sense to us volunteers because we see the value in the uniqueness of the service that we are providing. We feel quite strongly that we don’t

want to be like anyone else because people come to us for that reason. I don't think Central Charity see that value. It feels like our uniqueness is actually a nuisance to them. I guess because it makes it harder for us to get funding or whatever [Charlotte, 6 years, branch 4]

Another volunteer, 'Patrick', perceived the desire to become "more like other, larger voluntary organisations" as an attempt to conform to a set of institutionalised beliefs and processes that are effectively utilised by larger voluntary organisations which are considered legitimate and successful:

It feels a bit corporate, and a lot of corporate talk is used about visions and missions, which I hate, I used to work in management, so I find it bollocks. We are not like Oxfam who have vast resources, Oxfam is a multi-million-pound organisation, maybe billion pound, and they have executives at the top who are on six-figure salaries, and I'm not saying that that is right or wrong, I'm just saying that we are not like that and as far as I can tell, us on the ground have no desire to be like Oxfam. Those big money charities would never get away with promising absolute confidentiality [Patrick, 5 years, branch 1]

'Kacey' similarly contrasted Helpline with other charitable organisations like Oxfam and Save the Children to communicate the former's distinctiveness. In her account, she substantiated the paradox in vision that 'Patrick' alluded to by reflecting on a recent conversation that she had had with the Chairman of the Board of Trustees about the future direction of the organisation. She recalled being told:

"you're so wrong my dear, we are on our way to charity towers next to Whitehall, that's where we need to be".

On this conversation, she said:

I thought he was taking the piss, of course we don't want to be like Oxfam, in that big office bank near Milbank. Oxfam and Save the Children and these big money charities are based there. His view was that we should be in there because we should be influencing national policy. I think that we can influence national policy but actually, our power, our bedrock of power, is in the fact that we are not with all those other charities and we are not the same as all of them. When we talk to power, we talk from experience and knowledge and there is weight in that. Previously, we didn't take national money, we didn't take any funding because we were not prepared to give up any of our data, because we have to be confidential. Our power is that we have that reputation. I don't want to be Oxfam or the rest of them where they have paid employees going around behaving inappropriately in disaster areas...I am not entirely sure as an organisation that we are all going in the same direction, I think there is a whole group of people at the top who are going one way, and a whole group of people everywhere else who don't realise that we are going anywhere [Kacey, 12 years, branch 4]

In the above extract, 'Kacey' asserted that Helpline's 'power' resided in volunteers' 'experience and knowledge' again highlighting the central role of lived experience (see

chapter 6). She proceeded by raising concerns that conformity risked diminishing Helpline's sense of uniqueness:

I would hate to see us diluted by this... I think that we were very good at our bit [a listening service that provides emotional support], and I think that we are losing some of the goodness of our bit now to enable us to get more involved in other people's bits, if that makes sense? The thing is, callers don't want us to broaden our services, volunteers don't want it either, so where is that coming from? [Kacey, 12 years, branch 4]

An underpinning logic here is that Helpline should not adapt and conform to "large mainstream charities" because the approach used by these organisations is impractical for, and incompatible with, the type of organisation that characterises Helpline. This incompatibility appears to be due to the formal and professional nature that often typifies large voluntary organisations. Another interviewee similarly commented that Helpline was "different from, and *deliberately unlike* anything else that is available", again indicating Helpline's distinctiveness [Nate, 2 years].

The narrative throughout the extracts presented in this section of the chapter suggest that volunteers felt a strong emotional and psychological attachment towards the organisation's uniqueness, particularly in terms of its service offering. 'Daniel' expressed a sense of pride when discussing Helpline's uniqueness, his own belief was that the work of volunteers is important and valuable; providing insight into why volunteers remain committed to the organisation despite change:

I guess in some ways I understand why we need to change, but I think that there should be a lot more flexibility around how change is approached by individual volunteers...I get on with it because I think that we provide a necessary service. I'm proud to be a volunteer. If [Helpline] wasn't there, a lot of people wouldn't have anybody to talk to, to unload their worries and their concerns onto. Being available 24 hours a day means that we are able to do that. That is why I keep doing it, the work is really important [Daniel, 5 years, branch 1]

In this section of the chapter, the tension between Helpline's distinctiveness and its looming homogeneity has been examined. Data extracts suggest that greater conformity feels inauthentic and a betrayal of what volunteers believe the organisation stands for. In the following section, I will present the introduction of the safeguarding policy as one specific change that volunteers perceive is a choice made by Central Charity to conform to the practices of other organisations. Specifically, the safeguarding policy is an example of how 'conformity' is being operationalised. Moreover, safeguarding is depicted as contradicting the core values of the organisation and thus, highlights the blurring of boundaries between the

purpose of a statutory organisation and that of a voluntary organisation.

7.4.1 Safeguarding

In section 5.3, I demonstrated how Helpline's confidentiality, self-determination and non-judgmental values are positioned as a) the essence of Helpline's service and b) central to volunteers' ongoing commitment. The introduction of the safeguarding policy is a specific change that volunteers feel is threatening and disrupting these three values. 'Adele' is an illustrative case here, she expressed concern that conformity could risk mission drift, and the "erosion" of Helpline's unique values:

I feel that we are being slowly eroded to conform with the rules and ideas of the larger sector and we are losing sight of our core values. We are special, there is no doubt about it... but my worry is that we are slowly eroding this special organisation. That is a worry for me and for many others [Adele, 21 years, branch 4]

She continues:

I don't want us to lose our heart and I don't want us to lose our ethos, if that's the right word. I do worry about that because I feel that we are going in a direction now simply to conform with government and hierarchy or whatever. I feel that we are losing our heart at times [Adele, 21 years, branch 4]

Of all the changes taking place, interviewees highlighted the implementation of the new safeguarding policy as pivotal to their experiences of change due to the potential threat it exposes to Helpline's long-established confidentiality promise:

Safeguarding was introduced to allow the organisation to keep up to date with good practice in safeguarding children and vulnerable adults who are experiencing, or at risk of, serious harm or abuse. While in theory this sounds very logical and it may be surprising to some that there wasn't already something like this in place. It sparked a mutiny among volunteers because of what it would mean for the confidentiality promise [Mariah, 1 year, branch 5]

The threat to confidentiality was raised by a significant number of interviewees and there was consequently, resounding opposition and resistance to the policy. Reflecting on her own concerns, 'Tess' questioned her membership with Helpline but decided to stay to "fight against" changes; a strong indication of the extent of resistance:

Safeguarding really made me stand back and question whether I wanted to continue with [Helpline]. The policy completely contradicted everything we stood for. I didn't know if I would be able to continue in this new way, where I would have to breach confidentiality. It felt disingenuous. It sort of felt like I was cheating, not only my callers, but also myself and my own beliefs. A number of people actually decided that they didn't want to continue with their membership. I can completely understand that reaction and I did consider it myself, but, I don't think it's helpful in terms of trying to

fight against those changes. I felt an obligation to stand up for what the callers have long cherished [Tess, 3 years, branch 1]

Another volunteer, 'Bella', highlighted the importance of confidentiality to callers and drew upon her professional experience to express why she felt safeguarding was inappropriate in the context of Helpline:

So many of our callers ask us if the service is anonymous because it is such an important concept for them. I know from my own professional life, the importance of safeguarding, and in what instances a case should be reported and all the rest of it. But, with [Helpline], it was always very clear-cut from the beginning that in no circumstance should you involve somebody else and get intervention on behalf of the caller. Despite my background, the absence of a safeguarding policy made perfect sense in this context [Bella, 2 years, branch 1]

'Patrick' is an example of someone who felt so strongly about the changes to confidentiality that he chose to withdraw certain elements of his labour as a way of expressing his dissatisfaction with the newly implemented safeguarding policy. His account demonstrates formal and overt resistance:

The idea behind safeguarding was that we should do our damndest to get their name and address in order to get the authorities involved. It was quite difficult and very different from what we knew and cherished. At that point, I was involved in recruitment and outreach work. I resigned from those additional duties, I felt that I couldn't be recruiting and telling new volunteers about our approach to safeguarding when I didn't agree with it myself [Patrick, 5 years, branch 1]

In light of the safeguarding policy, some volunteers admitted to implementing their own, individual strategies when providing support to callers. These strategies reflect a deviation from 'new codes of conduct' which is an attempt, by volunteers, to preserve 'old Helpline practice' in a way that upholds traditional organisational values. 'Daniel' is an illustrative example of someone who expressed these more subtle forms of resistance:

When we started to put safeguarding into practice it did feel very clunky and I think that a lot of people now just do their own thing, experienced volunteers just do their own thing...what has happened is people have worked out for themselves how to do it in a way that suits them. It doesn't mean breaking all of the rules entirely, it's more subtle alterations I guess. We continue to operate within the realms of what is organisationally expected and acceptable. It's not really very good though because it means that often, there is a lack of consistency between volunteers and across branches [Daniel, 5 years, branch 1]

Some volunteers explained that they 'warn' callers when their discussion heads towards 'referral territory'. One interviewee, 'Rebecca', explained that "by warning callers, it discourages them from continuing down that line of discussion because it alerts them to the

risk of having their personal details passed on to safeguarding officers”. ‘Isaac’ echoes these sentiments:

Sometimes there are occasions when you recognise that somebody is vulnerable such as a child, but in these cases, you just have to warn them. You don't want to have to intervene against their wishes, so just by telling them that if they give any identifying information then you might have to pass it on. Once you've said that, they'll be careful and so involving a safeguarding officer doesn't often happen. We say to them, "look this is going into that area...if you give me any identifying information such as your location or phone number...". But if they don't want intervention, they just won't give it to you. So that's a good way around it [Issac, 13 years, branch 3]

In the words of one interviewee who was discussing these more subtle acts of deviation, ‘Billy’ claimed: “it makes policy changes more palatable and comfortable” for volunteers and helps them to “better deal with the changes to practice that they disagree with”. These deviations appear to uphold volunteers’ own values and ‘Martha’ claims that they are “better aligned with the traditional and long serving organisational values”. ‘Ivan’ is another example of someone who believes that safeguarding contradicts his own beliefs.

Furthermore, he fears that the change in policy could deter callers from using the service:

*Some changes do cut across our core principles, the organisation's principles that us volunteers feel extremely connected to. With safeguarding in particular, it does compromise those core values. Volunteers are not happy about it. We are worried that by neglecting our values, some people may not call us because it's no longer that safe place to turn. The way in which [Helpline] was set up, we were always the only entirely confidential place somebody could call. The fear has always been that at some point, we would lose that in order to keep up with societal and legislative changes. At some level, we have lost that, because in some circumstances we now have to explain that it is absolutely confidential **unless** there is a serious concern about their safety. So that caveat, once we say that, we sort of lose credibility. If we have information and we can identify the caller, we have an obligation now to override the caller's own feelings. Mostly though, after explaining that, people make damn sure not to tell us where they live or whatever. I dread it when a caller does give me their information because I absolutely do not want to intervene in the caller's life, especially where that intervention is not wanted. I would much rather have no caller information, that way, I can continue to uphold the traditional principles of [Helpline] and my own principles [Ivan, 5 years, branch 2]*

Another volunteer, ‘Alanna’ similarly expresses her concern that the safeguarding policy puts the entire caller-volunteer relationship in jeopardy and undermines trust:

What I have noticed off the back of the new safeguarding policy is that a lot less people call now to talk about things that they might not want to be public. By this, I mean like perpetrators of crime, sexual abuse, a paedophile, that kind of thing. Everyone knows about the change to our confidentiality procedure because it was in the papers, so callers are aware and if they are concerned that their number could be traced back, then they aren't going to keep calling and that's exactly what has happened. What if, by calling us that is preventing them from committing crimes?

Surely, in that case, we want to be able to offer confidentiality? You don't want to be in a position of judgement, and that is the whole ethos of [Helpline]. We are not people who are in a position to judge, whether we think that they are suitable to receive the service or not is irrelevant. I do find it a bit uncomfortable and I dread not being able to say to callers that we are entirely confidential. I think that maybe the change to confidentiality just makes our service unavailable to some people. I think people just feel more uncomfortable knowing that there is a safeguarding process now. I think it just makes people trust us much less [Alanna, 3 years, branch 5]

‘Malvin’ refers to the way that safeguarding necessitates a new way of working. He indicates that the obligation of volunteers to now breach caller confidentiality under certain circumstances, is central to this new way of working:

The key thing that I have come across as an issue with safeguarding is that people think, just as a matter of principle, that [Helpline] should be private... It is a matter of ideology and principle, some people think it should be 100% private, end of. By that, I mean volunteers and callers, they all think that way. [Helpline] has always operated that way successfully, and so people think it should remain that way. If we forego our confidentiality promise, that changes how we work and we'll need to unlearn things and discover a new way of working [Malvin, 1 year, branch 3]

Some volunteers believed that the threat to confidentiality was not the only organisational value that was vulnerable to this policy's implementation. ‘Amanda’ highlights the additional threat to the ‘non-judgemental’ value. She argues that the change to safeguarding involves the judgement of volunteers because they are responsible for deciding when a caller's case should be passed onto a safeguarding officer:

You are making judgements about somebody that you're telling you are not judging. Well, that is what we have always told our callers, and so they call now with the assumption that we are non-judgemental. We never used to judge at all you see, that was always really important. Now, we are non-judgemental, unless you sound like you might be vulnerable. In that case we must make a judgement about whether you are vulnerable and how to proceed with the call. So, what actually happens is the whole relationship changes, and the environment changes too when you go from being objective to making decisions for the caller [Amanda, 19 years, branch 1]

Data suggest that the deviation from Helpline's core values is poignant for volunteers because in their view, it reflects a complete departure from the ways in which they have been trained and socialised into understanding the organisation's objectives and codes of conduct since its beginning (see section 6.3). Some volunteers expressed a concern about preserving the standard of service offered to recipients. ‘Paul’ is an illustrative case here. He describes how the preoccupation with trying to adapt to the change creates a distraction for volunteers while performing their role:

When the mechanisms change, that's a distraction and the volunteer needs to spend time being trained and adapting to that change. Not only that, but other volunteers

need to support those who are finding it difficult because some volunteers aren't able to adapt easily. So simply getting used to the change can end up being a real distraction from what we're actually here to do [Paul, 17 years, branch 1]

Another volunteer, 'Malvin', worries that such a change, instead of improving the service, inhibits the support that they can give to service users:

So sometimes when you are on a call, you ought to be providing emotional support, but actually you are trying to figure out whether you need to tell someone from safeguarding about the caller's situation. So sometimes, we are saying things and asking things just to determine where to go with a call, rather than just helping and supporting the caller... that disturbs the flow of the conversation. Another way it affects it is when somebody is reluctant to talk, and previously you would just say "anything you say is completely private", but you can't say that anymore because it's not true...So it does affect the calls [Malvin, 1 year, branch 3]

Volunteer responses to the implementation of safeguarding vary, and although most indicate some degree of hostility and objection towards its implementation, there were a small number of volunteers who adopt a fatalistic approach and claim to be able to 'see the need' for its introduction, as reflected in the comments of 'Martha':

I think people [volunteers] have made a mountain out of a mole hill, it's absolutely ridiculous. To me the policy is completely obvious and makes complete sense. All its done is brought home to people what we have always done. Or at least, it's what I have always done. I guess it raises questions about how the majority of volunteers have conducted themselves. Safeguarding, as I say it's just been made into a mountain. I think people have misunderstood it [Martha, 15 years, branch 3]

The extracts presented in relation to Helpline's safeguarding policy overwhelmingly depict an organisation that is at risk of losing its identity, which in turn, appears to threaten the commitment of a significant number of volunteers. Again, like with the implementation of mentoring, the safeguarding policy appears to expose a contradiction between the way that Central Charity think the organisation should operate and the way that volunteers think it should operate. There were evident undertones in the extracts pertaining to the need for 'legitimacy' and 'effectiveness'; suggesting that the motivation for the policy was driven by a desire to present the organisation to external institutions as 'ethical' and 'in-line with best practice'.

7.5 Helpful or hopeless?

In chapter 6, through relevant data extracts, I revealed the importance of authenticity for volunteers in their interactions with service users. This was particularly evidenced through the depiction of the three types of challenging call (6.2). Volunteers reported feeling that

these challenging calls were often some of the best and most rewarding because they are the calls that volunteers feel are most helpful to callers. Moreover, they were framed in this way because they give volunteers the freedom to authentically express themselves and their personal values. In other words, these calls allow volunteers to achieve a fit between their inner and outer selves and thus, manifest a sense of identity in volunteers (section 6.4). In this section of the chapter, I will show that many volunteers feel that professionalisation and organisational changes are inhibiting the sense of authenticity and identity that volunteers derived from their roles. Moreover, the chapter will show, how organisational change is resulting in, what volunteers perceive to be, less helpful support. The findings presented here justify the dichotomy of ‘helpful or hopeless’ that constitutes the third subtheme within the ‘professionalisation as loss’ theme.

The empirical accounts presented throughout this chapter thus far reveal a sense of loss among volunteers; attributable to widespread organisational change. ‘Adele’ speaks of the “devastating” demise of Helpline’s organisational values and the negative affect this is having on her sense of belonging and her own sense of self, which for 21 years, has in part, been defined by her volunteer role:

It just feels like we are losing the essence of what we stand for and that’s devastating. The values that have underpinned the service for the last 60 or 70 years are changing and that is really problematic for many volunteers because it is those values that define not only our roles here, but also how we see our personal selves, outside [of Helpline]. Those values keep us here and keep us engaged with the work, we are so connected to those founding values. It feels like everything that mattered to us, that we cared about, is being lost. The new direction that [Helpline] seems to be going in... I’m struggling to see how it fits with my own beliefs and values now and that is making me question whether I still belong here [Adele, 21 years, branch 4]

‘Adele’ continues by drawing attention to the dialectical relationship between meaning and identity. She indicates a shared sense of ‘us’ and ‘ours’ among volunteers in relation to their collective beliefs, values and experiences, which facilitates a deep emotional connection that outsiders would fail to understand:

The problem with the changes stems from the fact that many of us get a sense of meaning and purpose from being here. With the changes, that sense of meaning and purpose is thrown into turmoil and we don’t really know how to feel about our roles and our positions anymore. It’s really hard to explain just how much this role means to us on a personal level to someone who isn’t a part of [Helpline] and who, perhaps hasn’t experienced the same things and trauma as us [volunteers] [Adele, 21 years, branch 4]

Several volunteers referred to the importance of their personal values and beliefs when discussing how they came to select Helpline as their chosen organisation to join. The

identification that ‘Imogen’ describes towards Helpline is indicative of the feelings that many other volunteers expressed during interviews. This identification is significant because it, in part, explains volunteers’ commitment:

Many of us selected [Helpline] because of the alignment between our own personal values and the values of the organisation. The problem though is that those original organisational values are changing and that leaves us feeling less connected to the work. Many of us are not invested in the changes whatsoever, so our connection to the organisation is really weakening. That should be a real concern for those at Central Charity because if volunteers aren’t feeling connected, they’ll just leave [Imogen, 17 years, branch 3]

For a significant number of volunteers, changes in the organisation are incongruent with volunteers’ personal values. One volunteer, ‘Rena’, referred to this incongruence as a “disconnect” between her own, personal values and those of the organisation. She feels that Helpline is no longer fulfilling its traditional values and thus, no longer reflects who she is, indicating weakened identification. She cautioned that while this disconnect is tolerable “for now”, ongoing change risks negating the sense of fulfilment and pride that she derives from her involvement:

I joined this organisation because, at one point, it really reflected who I am and what I stand for. That connection though, between my own values and the ones that [Helpline] upholds, or rather, did uphold, is diminishing because of the changes. For now, the disconnect is not so grave and I do still get a sense of fulfilment from my role and I still feel proud of what we do here. Sadly, those feelings are not as strong as they once were and I’m really concerned that as we continue to change, that disconnect that I feel, will widen. I’m not sure what I will do in that instance, but I certainly will be wondering what the point is. I know many others who are already thinking that way [Rena, 47 years, branch 1]

Another interviewee, ‘Billy’, similarly acknowledges that his personal values are no longer congruent with the organisational values. As a result of the changes, ‘Billy’ finds himself in a predicament in terms of his wavering commitment to Helpline. In his account, he articulates how, over time, his experience as a volunteer has changed:

There are parts of my identity that are tied to [Helpline]. For example, the confidentiality promise was so important to me because I truly believe that everyone deserves to have somewhere that they can go to discuss whatever is troubling them. When I sought a volunteering opportunity, [Helpline] was an easy choice for me because I know who I am and what I represent and [Helpline] was a good fit in that sense. The changes mean that I no longer feel that my perspective and the organisation’s perspective marry together. So, I’m not sure how I reconcile that discrepancy. I don’t want to be involved with something if I don’t feel like it represents who I am. Equally, I don’t want to leave either. I guess what I’m saying is that the decision to stay here is not as easy as the decision to join [Billy, 10 years,

branch 4]

As was the case with many volunteer interviews, ‘Rebecca’ reflects on the sense of pride that she felt working with Helpline prior to the organisational changes. This sense of pride indicates that her membership to Helpline contributes to her sense of self and enables her to construct a positive self-identity while bolstering her sense of self-esteem and self-worth. However, when comparing this experience with the way that she feels about Helpline following the changes, there is a sense that she has become, psychologically or emotionally, detached from the role:

The thing is, we could feel proud of what we were doing before. We were helping people in the way that they wanted to be helped. What they wanted was always our priority. But now, it feels like we help them in the way that the organisation thinks they should be helped. So, involving a safeguarding officer and that sort of thing. That is not what I signed up for. To be honest, I'd sooner not know about everything that is changing because it is becoming increasingly apparent that I'm not invested in the new way of doing things [Rebecca, 14 years, branch 3]

‘Elise’ is an example of one volunteer, who she herself, appears not to be concerned about how change will affect her own identity. However, her account reveals the unmistakable threat of change to the identities of her long-serving, experienced colleagues and she cautions that this could result in high levels of turnover:

I think that a lot of people feel threatened by the changes because of their own limitations. For those who are really invested in [Helpline] in terms of their sense of identity, it's easier for them to ignore that [Helpline] is growing and evolving. Instead, some want to cling onto it, onto the old way of doing things because that brings security in terms of their understandings of themselves. Many volunteers have been here for a really long time and so, their sense of who they are revolves around their involvement with [Helpline]. The changes deviate from where they envisioned that the organisation was going and that has been really unsettling for them. My concern is that we could end up losing some of our most experienced volunteers because they are no longer getting what they were before from their membership [Elise, 1 year, branch 2]

7.5.1 Technological change

In chapter 6, I demonstrated the sense of meaning and identity that volunteers derived from their involvement in Helpline. Specifically, I depicted how the way volunteers carried out their role, autonomously and authentically, strongly contributed to that sense of identity. The introduction of technological change is a specific change that volunteers feel is threatening and disrupting how they carry out their work and is changing the way volunteers interact with service users. Volunteers emphasised the effects of two technological changes in particular that they felt made their work less helpful and more hopeless. The first, is the introduction of

a new service model that extends accessibility by adding additional channels of communication through which callers can make contact e.g., from traditional telephone support to email and SMS messaging. The second technological development, is the introduction of a new electronic reporting tool, named the E-log system. Each of these will be examined in turn.

7.5.1.1 Increased accessibility

When Helpline was founded, a single telephone line offered a safe place for people to receive emotional support for their concerns. Since then, hundreds of phones are now staffed by more than 21,000 volunteers across more than 200 branches. In order to align with the trends of the 21st century, ‘Alesha’ describes how Helpline has changed the way it listens to people by extending the channels of communication beyond the phone to email and SMS:

The intention is to increase access to support for the people at the highest risk of suicide who are least likely to engage with existing services. So, we’ve introduced email which is good for those who might be living with domestic abuse and can’t talk freely on the phone. We’ve introduced SMS messaging which is particularly good for the younger generation who often do not feel comfortable talking on the phone. We’re also piloting other things like Skype and instant messaging [Alesha, 2 years, branch 5]

While the majority of volunteers could understand the need for this change and many, in theory, supported the broadening of access to additional populations, many felt disenfranchised that the ‘listening’ and ‘human contact’ values would take on a different meaning. ‘Camila’ focussed on the way that the delivery of empathy, and the expression of authenticity that comes with that, has changed since the introduction of SMS and email. She described the significance of this for both, her volunteer role and her own sense of self:

Many volunteers consider themselves to be empathetic and that empathy is a very strong part of how many of us self-identify. Being empathetic is how I would describe the very core of my being. So, the way that the dynamic of empathetic care has changed is so troubling for me because I feel as though I’m no longer being true to myself. We’re having to alter how we deliver the service which is challenging for us because that means changing who we are on the phone. In some respects, it calls into question, not only what the organisation stands for, but also, what that means for me and what I know about myself and how I see myself [Camila, 4 years, branch 4]

Commenting on the additional means of communication, ‘Ivan’ asserted that the telephone is a “cherished” means of communication for many volunteers. He indicates dissatisfaction with the operational challenges of email and SMS and claims that service delivery in this format feels “less helpful”:

It does throw up challenges and I get that we need to do texting and instant messaging, but as a volunteer, as a listening volunteer, it throws up other challenges. It can feel like those ways of communicating are less helpful because you are constrained by text characters and so you tend to have quick flitty short conversations. Traditionally, the phone conversation allows you to explore feelings in more depth and you build a bit more of a rapport with the caller and you can understand more from the tone of their voice and the emotions that you can hear when you are on the phone which you don't get with email and texting. I think it does put a slightly different slant on how we offer the service, through texting in particular. They can be very circular because you're never really getting beyond a quick response so they tend to just go round and round on a daily or weekly basis and there is less of a sense often, that you are really helping somebody work through something in detail, it is a bit more superficial almost. Not necessarily less worthy, but just different [Ivan, 5 years, branch 2]

‘Jacqueline’ similarly expresses feeling that these additional means of communication are less helpful. ‘Jacqueline’ highlights the challenge of establishing a connection which was previously positioned as a genuine and legitimate aspiration for volunteers to ‘help’ callers (p. 121):

The written communication is challenging for several reasons. You have a limited number of characters which is ridiculous, I am quite wordy and I don't see the point of giving a snap, facile response to somebody who is feeling desperate or suicidal, that is not going to cut the mustard really. Volunteers also pick up the emails and SMS on an adhoc basis, so there is no continuity in that support. It inevitably means that you just go round in circles asking over and over how the caller is feeling, there is no connection between us [caller and volunteer]. You certainly can't listen actively. There is no resolution for the caller. I don't think either is particularly helpful for the caller. I am not a fan. [Jacqueline, 1 year, branch 4]

Given that the commitment and identity of volunteers is driven by their ability to ‘help’ people (chapter 6) and that technological change appears to be hindering that, volunteer accounts indicate that they are left feeling disenfranchised about the way ‘help’ appears to constitute something different with these more recent forms of communication.

7.5.1.2 E-log system

Helpline’s move away from the traditional paper style of reporting to the new E-log system (see table 7.1) was a source of dissatisfaction for many volunteers. One long serving volunteer, ‘Rena’, expresses concern about the way in which this change has affected the emotional connection with callers:

I am not an early adopter of technology, I'm not quite a luddite but I'm not an early adopter anyway. I worry that sometimes we do things just because we can, even though we shouldn't. With the new E-log system, I guess that's how other charities report their activities, maybe that's why we've decided to do it. I can see why the E-

log is great for gathering statistics but it extracts the meaning from the call... inputting it all on electronic media, all you have is a tick box exercise, you haven't got any of the content, and you can't convey how desperately worried someone is. What it's done is, it's almost taken away the emotional connection between the volunteer and the caller and for what? Just so we can gather statistics for funding purposes? I feel that that's not done us any favours. It has affected how volunteers report their shift, and perceive their shift, and also the way they handle their calls [Rena, 47 years, branch 1]

In the above extract, 'Rena' highlights two poignant issues concerning the E-log system that many others conveyed during interviews. The first relates to the capabilities of volunteers and the ease at which they are able to adopt new technologies. The second relates to the usefulness of new technology in the context of Helpline. 'Rena' questions the suitability of this new system and indicates that its implementation, again, serves the external need for statistics. This idea is developed in the following extract taken from the interview with 'Jada':

It's lost the personal element for volunteers because what we feel is important about a call, is not what the E-log represents. We should be recording what we think is important. For example, if the organisation was collecting statistics to see how many young men were ringing [Helpline], and of those, how many were suicidal, that would be a valuable statistic to have. But what about something like mums who are feeling suicidal after having a baby, so postnatal depression. There could be millions of them out there, but [Helpline] wouldn't know because that is not something that we are measuring, because the E-log system doesn't ask us about that. We are only measuring what they [Central Charity] think we should measure. If I was able to say, 'postnatal depression mum' on the E-log, someone at Central Charity would likely say 'we are getting a lot of these postnatal depression calls, perhaps this is something that we need to keep an eye on'. But, we can't do that because that is not one of the options on the E-log report, so things go unnoticed. I have to say that I am very cynical about it now. The E-log, I fill it in as accurately as I can, but I don't waste time on it. If I don't know which box the call should be logged in, I just think that it's not important, because actually it's more important that I get the log out of the way and get back on the phone. I don't misrepresent or deliberately warp the statistics, I do my best, but I don't waste any time on it. [Jada, 13 years, branch 4]

Here, 'Jada' articulates some of the perceived limitations with this new method of reporting. She highlights the inability of the E-log system to identify important, emerging trends because of the inadequacy of the technological system. Furthermore, she draws attention to the confusion that can occur when inputting data into the E-log. For example, she suggests that if a volunteer cannot easily identify which box best reflects the call, the risk is that volunteers lose patience and tick any box in a bid to "get back" to callers and to prevent wasting time. This point is related to the concern expressed by many volunteers that they 'are not here for statistics' and that 'being there for callers' is their main drive.

Some volunteers spoke of the interdependence between safeguarding and the E-log system. For these volunteers, it seems that the entire purpose of the E-log is to enable the organisation to record the number of safeguarding cases. One volunteer, 'Caitlyn' claimed, "the reporting of safeguarding cases helps generate an externally driven picture of the number of people that [Helpline] helps or saves". Data generation was a frequent matter of contention for volunteers and thus, the E-log is seen as possessing some of the same shortcomings as safeguarding. One volunteer, 'Elise' highlights the inconsistencies and statistical distortion that can occur when specifically reporting safeguarding cases:

We should be consistent in terms of how we log a case that might have had issues about safeguarding. With safeguarding... Is it a child or is it somebody between 13 and 18 who cannot make reasoned arguments and understand the argument to arrive at a decision for themselves, or are they a vulnerable adult, and one way of finding that out is if they are on medication or have a support worker or have a previous history of mental health and so on. But there are lots of cases where, the criteria of 'vulnerable adult, or child, or adolescent' can't actually arrive at a clear decision for themselves and you can tick that box. They might be in a position of imminent harm but you can't proceed any further because they don't want to tell you anything else, but we should still be logging that as being a safeguarding issue that then states that no further action was taken. Whereas some people think that wouldn't be safeguarding because they haven't done anything about it. So even at the very basic level, we're not actually following procedures, so we are skewing the statistics. If it was actually put down as a safeguarding issue with no further action taken, the statistics would then show that we intervene in even fewer cases. So there is all of that confusion and suspicion [Elise, 1 year, branch 2]

The empirical findings presented here reveal the profound affect that change is having upon volunteers' experiences. In particular, this section demonstrates that the sense of purpose and identity that volunteers derive from their activity is not perennial and indeed, can change over the life-course of a volunteer's membership. The organisational changes, for many, have led to a state of dissonance and disidentification; inducing in volunteers, a sense of grief and displacement as they struggle to make sense of Helpline's transition.

7.5.2 Summary

This empirical chapter simultaneously examined Helpline's response to the changing economic and political landscape and the implications on volunteers' experiences. The data throughout this chapter depicts Helpline's professionalisation response to these changes. Conversations with volunteers revealed that Helpline's professionalisation strategy included: a tightening up of the organisations structure and governance to enable the centrally located head office to strengthen its control over volunteers and branches; the implementation of a

safeguarding policy to allow the organisation to keep up to date with good practice in safeguarding children and vulnerable adults; the use of ever more sophisticated technologies to allow for standardisation and statistical compilation; and finally, the introduction of a performance measurement programme termed ‘on-going mentoring’.

This chapter revealed that central to interviewees perceptions of professionalisation was the centralisation of power and the consequent loss of volunteer voice. For many volunteers, they opposed and resisted the centralisation of power because it represented: a move away from the community-based model of operation towards a more businesses-like way of functioning; the replacement of local autonomy and control with a more bureaucratic system of governance; weakened “grassroots” power and control and finally, a diminishing sense of organisational uniqueness. This chapter revealed the competing interests between volunteers and Central Charity with the former’s desire to preserve the organisation’s uniqueness and the latter’s desire for conformity. The findings presented in the two empirical chapters will now be returned to in the following discussion chapter that seeks to analyse the findings more comprehensively in line with extant literature.

Chapter Eight: Discussion and Analysis

8.1 Introduction

The main aim of this thesis is to uncover the ‘meaning’ of volunteering for Helpline volunteers. Throughout this thesis, Helpline has been established as a particularly distinctive organisation that, for more than sixty years, has enjoyed a strong and stable organisational identity. Helpline’s identity was primarily attributable to the organisation’s uniqueness; something that volunteers found engaging and compelling (see chapters five and six). To uncover the ‘meaning’ of volunteering for Helpline members, it was necessary to anatomise volunteering as a social construct. To do this, attention has been paid to both, conceptual or cognitive meanings and to the existential or emotive meanings (von Essen 2016). Against the backdrop of what is perceived to be an increasingly professionalised sector, this chapter analyses findings in relation to the ‘meaning’ of volunteering through an examination of volunteer experiences. Specifically, this thesis explores what happens to the ‘meaning’ of volunteering following change and ‘professionalisation’ (a project which, chapter two revealed, has a very distinctive purpose and set of values). The politically shaped and determined values of so-called accountability, legitimacy and improved efficiency that are associated with professionalisation are the antithesis of the values and purpose of Helpline, of which volunteers are highly committed (see figure 4.1 for Helpline’s mission and core values). These conflicting government-volunteer values are at the centre of this thesis and herein lies this study’s contribution to the acutely underdeveloped evidence base pertaining to volunteers’ experiences (Broadfoot et al 2008; Musick and Wilson 2008; Smith and Greenwood 2014; Mackenzie et al 2015; Wilks 2016; Smith et al 2018).

This chapter brings together the central themes identified in the three preceding findings chapters and unpacks their meaning with reference back to the established literature (chapters two and three). The three preceding, empirical chapters explored a different aspect of ‘being’ a Helpline volunteer and ‘doing’ Helpline work: chapter five examined the organisational characteristics and context within which volunteer work takes place; chapter six examined the nature of volunteer ‘work’ and the meanings that volunteers ascribed to their volunteering and chapter seven explored how organisational change affects both, volunteer understandings of their work and the volunteer experience. These chapters presented the findings of this study, organised around the themes of: ‘A distinctive value-driven organisation’, ‘authentic emotion work’ and ‘professionalisation as loss’ (see chapters 5-7, respectively). This current

chapter interprets, analyses and explains the empirical observations and revisits the literature in light of the empirical analysis, building up the overall story that the themes reveal about the topic.

Broadly, the analysis presented throughout this chapter responds to calls for research to explore the consequences of professionalisation upon voluntary organisations (Vantilborgh et al 2011; Vantilborgh and Van Puyvelde 2017; Alfes et al 2017). Interestingly, the inherent connotations of ‘professionalisation’ suggest that organisational change is positive and that the presumed outcome of improved services will be guaranteed. This is the narrative promulgated by government and policy makers and there is an established literature that has explored their motives for pursuing professionalisation (see chapter two). Much less is known about the motivations driving organisational adherence and compliance to this state-driven desire, especially within the voluntary sector which, according to the literature, has values and missions that are inconsistent and incompatible with the tenets of professionalisation. This thesis contributes to this empirical gap and examines the ‘fall out’ of volunteers as Helpline embarks on a process of ‘professionalisation’. In doing so, volunteers are able to control the ‘professionalisation’ narrative, thus, reversing current depictions that glorify the outcomes of professionalisation. In other words, this analysis moves beyond the consequences of professionalisation at an organisational level and contributes to the dearth of literature that empirically investigates what professionalisation means for volunteers and voluntary work (at a micro level) (Valeau et al 2019).

External changes and pressures are driving internal organisational change within Helpline (see chapter seven). Thus, in an attempt to capture the interaction between the internal and external pressures, this chapter firstly returns to a (less empirical) analysis of the wider social, economic and political environment that Helpline resides. The chapter then proceeds to analyse the specific organisational changes that Helpline has implemented in response to external pressures. These two components of the analysis provide the foundation for the most significant, and in my mind, most interesting, aspect of the analysis. That is, the inherent tensions and contradictions that arise between the interests of government and those of volunteers. Put simply, the organisational changes that have been driven by the wider political and economic landscape expose an incompatibility between the aspiration of government for standardised service provision, that emphasises efficiency, transparency and accountability and the aspiration of volunteers to preserve Helpline’s uniqueness and retain its values of confidentiality, caller choice and non-judgemental service provision. Here, the analysis centres on what these inherent tensions and contradictions mean for the experiences

of volunteers who derive a sense of purpose, meaning and identity from their membership to this unique organisation. Ultimately, this chapter analyses what is ‘lost’ from an organisational and individual perspective in the redrawn sector-state relationship.

8.2 A redrawn relationship

From the outset of this chapter, it is necessary to return to an evaluation of the wider social, economic and political environment within which Helpline resides because, as this thesis confirms, the voluntary sector appears to be particularly susceptible to this wider shifting landscape (Alcock 2010; Jones et al 2016; Aitken and Harris 2017; Chapman 2017; Kirwan 2017). To do so, it is useful to return to the unique conceptual framework that was depicted at the end of chapter 3. The contribution of this framework becomes particularly palpable in this analysis chapter where details of how it speaks to specific literatures within the context of voluntary sector studies feature. Firstly, the framework provides valuable insights into voluntary sector – state relations and how isomorphic pressures can be traced to volunteering activities and volunteers’ experiences (see figure 3.1 below). The shifts in the broader landscape, particularly the significance of the contract culture and the relationship between the VS and the state, are common denominators that loom behind much of the organisational change that Helpline is experiencing. This first contribution is unpacked in this section of the analysis (8.2), before the chapter moves on to explain how the framework contributes to other specific literatures such as crisis volunteering (a significant, yet under-theorised, type of voluntary work), theorisations of the volunteer experience (how it changes over the life course of a volunteer’s membership) and finally, the identity-volunteering link (namely, the strong interplay between one’s personal identity and one’s role identity in the context of volunteering). These contributions provide valuable insights into the ways that voluntary organisations can harness the ‘emotional attachment’ of volunteers to enhance volunteer retention. Thus, the value of these contributions extend beyond the academic literature and indeed could be of value to practitioners and policy makers.

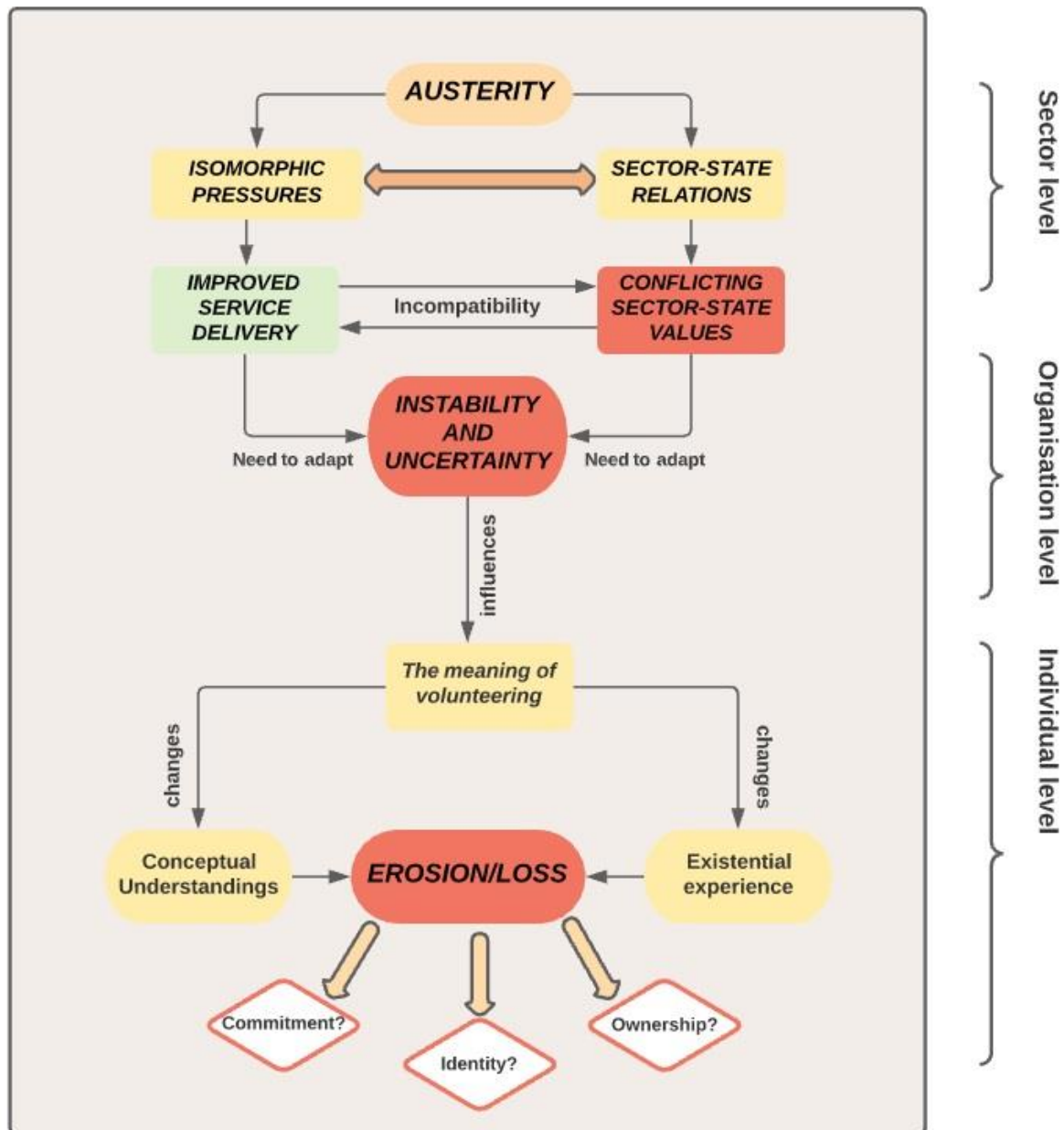


Figure 3.1 conceptual framework from page 64

Chapter two reviewed the historical role of the voluntary sector in service provision and argued that since the 1980s, VOs have been increasingly relied upon to position themselves as alternative providers of services to the state (Macmillan 2010). The economic and social issues associated with public service provision can be traced back to the neo-liberal challenges of the post-war welfare state consensus. Thatcher's commitment to 'roll back the state' and end the perceived 'dependency culture' continues to cast a shadow over the way that service provision is designed and delivered today (Lowe 2005). The 'contracting out' of public services to alternative providers positioned the voluntary sector at the heart of the

‘mixed economy of welfare’ (Hills 2011). The sector’s increased involvement in service provision coincided with the emergence of this ‘contract culture’, which led to significant changes in the way that the sector’s activities were funded: most notably through the replacement of government grants with service contracts. Government, in effect, became a contracting agency by purchasing services instead of directly providing them. This enabled the state to retain its role as funder while transferring its task as provider to a variety of independent suppliers such as VOs. In this redrawn sector-state relationship, contracts are awarded to suppliers of services for specific types and levels of service provision (Moxham 2013; Furneaux and Ryan 2015; Morris et al 2015). The consequence is that VOs increasingly depend on government funding for their continued survival, resulting in greater government control and influence over the activities of the VS (Smith et al 1995: 62).

To be considered for funding (let alone secure it) VOs must accept the short term and prescriptive nature of contract specifications while adhering to the strict compliance requirements that are embedded in the contracting process. The increased control and influence of government, and funders more generally, has been interpreted as their desire to ensure that services are delivered in a way that meets their expectations and are comparable to, and consistent with, those that are delivered by public and private sector organisations (captured in the ‘sector’ level of conceptual framework). Notwithstanding, external government expectations for so-called efficiency, accountability and legitimacy were driven by political priorities rather than the founding principles of VOs themselves. The meaning of these politically contested concepts (efficiency, accountability and legitimacy) shift as different governments are elected which culminates in increasing uncertainty and pressure for VOs as they are forced to perpetually re-design and re-direct their ‘priorities’ towards different stakeholders depending on who they perceive themselves to be accountable to, for what and how (see pages 24-35 for full review). These standards have cultivated an operating environment that is characterised by fierce competition where VOs must strive to showcase themselves as the most attractive choice for the contract. For many VOs, such conditions led to a complete reconstruction of their identities where they had to alter their behaviours, capacities, organisational structures and even goals as a way of enhancing their competitive appeal to emerge as more suitable providers that could meet state demands (Jessop 2003; Barnes 2006; Cunningham 2016) (captured in the ‘instability and uncertainty component of the conceptual framework).

Chapters five and six, which examined empirical findings from volunteers’ perceptions, conceptualised Helpline and the service it offered as ‘distinctive’ and ‘value-

driven'. Helpline, through its unique organisational characteristics and dedicated volunteer workforce, had carved out a space within mental health service provision that enabled volunteers to offer something distinctly different from existing services. Within these empirical chapters, the inherent contradictions between the state's desire for improved efficiency, accountability and legitimacy and the desire of volunteers to preserve Helpline's uniqueness emerged; with the two sets of goals (those of government and those of volunteers) emerging as antithetical. These inherent contradictions and tensions were unpacked in Chapter 7 through the central theme 'professionalisation as loss' and through the three sub-themes which were framed as questions to capture the severe dichotomy set up in volunteers' narratives that positioned organisational change as the antithesis of the previous (and mostly preferred) way of working. They included: 'centralised control or volunteer-led?', 'homogenous or distinct?' and 'hopeless or helpful?' (The content of these subthemes are reflected in the 'individual level' of the conceptual framework which explores the implications for volunteer commitment, identity and ownership).

Since its inception in the 1950s, when the act of suicide was illegal, Helpline originated as a source of support for those who were 'controversially' contemplating suicide. The organisation's primary purpose had always been to exist as an alternative to state services. Despite the decriminalisation of suicide in the 1960s, Helpline continued to provide a unique service which was bound up with its long-established values (see figure 4.1). However, according to volunteers, the recent organisational changes (implemented as a means of securing public funding) have shifted the meaning of the Helpline service; making it similar and more comparable to services offered by the state. In the following section, I will return to the specific organisational changes that Helpline was in the process of implementing at the time of data collection. Noteworthy, the various changes were at different points of implementation, with the safeguarding policy the most recent. Following this, I will revisit the unique organisational characteristics that volunteers presented as firstly, the essence of this alternative organisation and secondly, a compelling source of commitment. They include: possessing autonomy and agency to help people (volunteer-led approach); being given the opportunity to enact personal values (value-driven) and being allowed to use their own lived experiences to help and support those who are experiencing distress (authenticity). Finally, I will analyse how change is threatening these sources of uniqueness and commitment and examine what affect this is having on the volunteer experience.

8.2.1 Conformity through ‘professionalisation’

Changes in the macro environment (addressed above, and depicted in the ‘sector level’ component of conceptual framework) have exposed Helpline to a plethora of meso and micro issues as management attempts to position the organisation as one that is capable of meeting the expectations and demands of government and funders (depicted in ‘organisation level’ and ‘individual level’ components of conceptual framework). This repositioning has incited widespread organisational change that purportedly reflects greater accountability, legitimacy and efficiency (see section 7.2). While such government-defined objectives, in a more typical ‘business’ context, might be considered reasonable, valid and advantageous, they have precipitated widespread concern within Helpline because, as volunteers indicated, the organisation has never operated or functioned as a ‘business’ in such a traditional sense. In other words, these objectives were considered incongruous with volunteers’ understandings of the Helpline service and their applicability in this context was forcefully disputed. Organisational change implied that: 1) accountability should be directed upwards, towards funders and government; 2) efficiency should be achieved by using tangible and measurable indicators that can generate a statistical depiction of the number of people that volunteers ‘help’ or ‘save’ and 3) legitimacy should be gained by adopting best practice principles and processes. For volunteers, each of these objectives were concerning because: 1) the organisation had always been accountable to its service users and there was concern about how that would translate the ‘callers’ needs’ focus; 2) in terms of efficiency, the organisation had always actively avoided expressions such as “saving people” and “reducing suicide” due to its highly regarded organisational values and 3) in terms of legitimacy, Helpline had always been characterised as “standing completely alone in who it is and how it operates” (see table 8.1). Consequently, this thesis cautions that the inherent positive connotations of professionalisation that are elsewhere associated with improved service should not be assumed in the context of VOs like Helpline (more on this later in the chapter).

The various changes presented in table 8.1 suggest that Helpline, despite its uniqueness, is indeed, susceptible to the shifts and pressures of the economic and political environment, indicating the organisation’s increased reliance on government funding (Alcock 2010; Jones et al 2016; Aitken and Harris 2017; Chapman 2017; Kirwan 2017). The table reflects volunteers’ understandings of change and highlights the NPM-style narrative that was adopted internally in discussions surrounding organisational change (see table 2.1 adapted from Hood (1995), for the main features and objectives of NPM). The specific organisational changes appear to confirm the vast amount of influence and control that funders have over

the nature of service delivery that many writing in the field have observed (Moxham 2013; Furneaux and Ryan 2015; Morris et al 2015).

	Change	What it looked like in practice (Pre → Post) change	Which state-defined objective is change attempting to meet?
1	Safeguarding	Absolute caller confidentiality → Intervention of a safeguarding officer/third party where necessary.	Legitimacy: An ethical change based on good practice.
2	Mentoring	Volunteers operated autonomously → Strict working requirements and increased scrutiny and surveillance.	Efficiency: Quality control that achieves consistency in service provision.
3	E-log system	No required reporting → Requirement to log and report calls with increased emphasis on caller outcomes.	Accountability: Statistics are generated of the number of people that volunteers help or 'save'.
4	Extended channels of communication	Telephone and face-to-face contact → Email and SMS; emphasis on increased accessibility.	Effectiveness: Service supports an increased number of people.
5	Restructure	Autonomous and independent branches, led and run by volunteers → Centralised control and decision making.	Accountability: Central Office represents branches as a cohesive, unified organisation.

Table 8. 1 Overview of Helpline's organisational changes in response to external pressures

The fundamental issue brought about by conformity (through professionalisation), in volunteers' minds, was the erosion of Helpline's uniqueness and the subsequent sense of loss that negatively affected volunteers' experiences. It is necessary to analyse the specific organisational changes as they form the basis for understanding the inherent contradictions that arose (further developed later in the chapter). In examining the nature and features of Helpline's central changes, this thesis acknowledges Broadbridge and Parsons (2003: 729) criticism of VS change, that: "professionalisation is often used as a catchall phrase embracing a plethora of unexamined changes". Volunteers used a range of synonymous and interchangeable concepts to describe the entire change process, which included, becoming 'business-like', 'corporate', 'formal' and 'professional'. These conceptualisations reflected the different types of organisational change that Helpline was implementing at the time of data collection. For example, some changes were structural, others were new policies that might be viewed as ethical or based on established good practice (safeguarding) and some were managerialist in nature and imported from other sectors (mentoring, technological change) (see table 8.1).

Data in chapter seven revealed that the organisational changes occurred as a result of Central Charity's desire to 'conform'. Conformity was inferred from volunteers' statements such as: "we are trying to be like other organisations" and "the organisation is obsessed with emulating the practices of larger charities". Management's desire to secure funding is interpreted as Helpline mimicking a model that does not suit the ethos or essence of the organisation (an important point that will be returned to later in the chapter). It is useful here to apply DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) concept of isomorphism, which is described as the process of an organisation conforming to dominant arrangements in the surrounding organisational environment. This process describes how both, deliberate and accidental choices lead institutions to mirror the norms, values and ideologies of the 'organisational field' (Di Maggio and Powell 1983: 147). The concepts of institutional isomorphism and isomorphic processes help explain the pressures that have forced Helpline to become increasingly similar to other organisations. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) identified three mechanisms through which institutional isomorphic change occurs: coercive, mimetic and normative isomorphism. Coercive isomorphism occurs when pressure is exerted by policies or regulations and is mandated by external stakeholders. Mimetic isomorphism occurs when organisations mimic the behaviour or strategies of other organisations that are perceived to be superior or legitimate. Normative isomorphism occurs when norms and beliefs from outside

the organisation are transferred into the organisation by individuals or groups (e.g., due to the employment of persons with specific education) (see chapter two for full review).

The table of changes (8.1) suggest that Helpline was vulnerable to each of the three isomorphic pressures, with clear distinctions difficult to discern due to the numerous changes reflecting variations of all three types of pressure (Sowa 2008). Noteworthy, having only interviewed volunteers, and therefore having not had access to the perspectives of paid personnel, it is unclear exactly which isomorphic pressures (coercive, mimetic and normative) Helpline is responding to. To take the implementation of the safeguarding policy as an example, some volunteers indicated that it was a response to coercive pressures; emanating from the desire to satisfy external stakeholders, namely government. This was reflected in many volunteer accounts like ‘Ivan’s’ where he refers to the need to “keep up with societal and legislative changes” (p. 142). Other volunteers suggested that the safeguarding policy was an attempt by Central Charity to become “more like other, larger voluntary organisations” who are considered legitimate and successful (p. 138); indicating that Helpline was responding to mimetic pressures. A smaller number of volunteers believed that safeguarding was a consequence of paid staff being brought into the organisation to implement their ‘business expertise’ (p. 133); suggesting that Helpline was responding to normative pressures. In an attempt to offer some clarity, below is a table of the five organisational changes and how I, having spoken to volunteers at length and having undertaken an extensive review of the literature, would categorise each of them in relation to DiMaggio and Powell (1983) three mechanisms of institutional isomorphic pressures.

Organisational change		Isomorphic pressure		
		Coercive	Mimetic	Normative
1	Safeguarding	X		
2	Mentoring			X
3	Structural change	X		
4	E-log system		X	
5	Increased accessibility		X	

Table 8. 2 Helpline’s changes categorised using DiMaggio and Powell’s (1983) three mechanisms of isomorphic pressure.

Regardless of how volunteers categorised the pressures that Helpline faced, primary data revealed that the changes were driven by Central Charity's broader desire to simply 'professionalise' by adhering to good practice and 'business-like' principles (Dart 2004). As discussed above, the narrative of volunteers indicated that this 'professionalised' way of working was incompatible with the type of organisation that Helpline was. Chapter four presented an historic account of Helpline's organisational structure and it is this that appears to be at the core of this incompatibility. Helpline, up until 2016, operated within a federated organisational structure where autonomous branches were rooted in, and financed by, their local communities. The state-defined objectives of accountability, efficiency and legitimacy, which are seemingly more appropriate for those organisations that are large, formal and business-natured, are a complete departure from Helpline's original essence and ethos. The former priorities of 'localism and community' appear to have been dethroned by Central Office's desire to a) secure funding and b) present Helpline as a coherent, national organisation capable of influencing policy. This analysis was further interpreted from volunteer accounts such as 'Kacey's' who recalls a conversation that she had had with the Chairman of the Board of Trustees about the future direction of the organisation: "We are on our way to charity towers next to Whitehall, that's where we need to be" (p. 138). Additionally, evidence of the desire to be 'influencing' policy is further reflected in Helpline's current priority areas (see figure 4.2 for overview). Chapter seven revealed that Helpline volunteers consequently suspect that the original organisational values (that they were personally aligned with) are being subsumed within a wider political project, not of their own making.

These findings are consistent with the literature that argues that business-like goals may degrade the 'values focus' that characterises many voluntary organisations (Hall and O'Dwyer 2017; Ebrahim 2003; Christensen and Ebrahim 2006; Jones 2007; O'Dwyer and Unerman 2008; Hudson 2010; Bennett and Savani 2011; Billis 2010; Milbourne 2013; Rochester 2013; Agyemang et al 2017; Bennett and Savani 2011; Jones 2007). The following discussion unpacks and analyses this incompatibility by examining a series of 'inherent tensions' that are at the centre of volunteers' experiences. The discussion will show how organisational change is eroding Helpline's cherished uniqueness and how this in turn, is disrupting volunteer commitment.

8.2.1.1 Beyond ‘mission drift’

Within voluntary sector studies, scholars have explored the, mostly negative, effects of professionalisation at either, an organisational or sector level of analysis. For example, consequences of professionalisation have included “mission drift” (Macmillan 2010: 7) as well as a diminishing sense of: organisational autonomy, innovation and community action (Milbourne and Cushman 2012). The professionalisation debate though, has largely bypassed the micro-level of analysis, that is, the impact on volunteers. This is where this research most contributes. In particular, very little is known about the complex reality of what professionalisation means for the sustained commitment of volunteers. This is an important issue for volunteering studies, not least because volunteer commitment and retention are tied to organisational survival (Brudney and Meijs 2009; Vecina et al 2012; Alfes et al 2014). More contextually relevant is Barz’s (2001) observation that very few studies focus on the commitment of volunteers within crisis hotline settings. Writing later, Aguirre and Bolton (2013: 327) confirm this empirical gap, commenting that the “meagre research” in the context of crisis hotlines fails to differentiate findings from any other type of volunteer work. To contribute to this empirical gap, the following discussion analyses the factors that contribute to volunteer commitment in the context of crisis hotlines and proceeds to examine how these sources of commitment are affected by organisational change and professionalisation. This analysis therefore not only contributes to the theoretical question of what sustains volunteers but additionally, extends understanding of the widely neglected area of volunteers’ experiences (see: Broadfoot et al 2008; Musick and Wilson 2008; Smith and Greenwood 2014; Mackenzie et al 2015; Wilks 2016; Smith et al 2018). In doing so, this chapter elicits valuable insights into the cognitive and existential meaning of volunteering (Brudney and Meijs 2009; Vecina et al 2012).

The remainder of this chapter analyses the relationship between the internal environment (the individual experience of volunteering) and the external environment (the drivers of organisational change). In doing so, this chapter provides a nuanced story about the way the three levels of analysis outlined in the conceptual framework (sector, organisational and individual) relate and interact with one another. To ensure coherence in the presentation of this story, the remainder of this chapter will be reported in three parts; reflecting the three primary sources of volunteer commitment that were derived from the empirical chapters. These three sources of volunteer commitment include a) being a value-driven organisation (section 8.3), b) being a volunteer-led organisation (section 8.4) and c) providing a service that is predicated on the authenticity and lived experiences of volunteers (section 8.5). Within

each of these three sections, analysis centres on: how these sources of commitment offer volunteers a sense of meaning, purpose and identity as well as how specific organisational changes (safeguarding, restructure and technological change) are threatening these sources of commitment and the significant consequences that ensue for the way volunteers understand and perceive the meaning of their efforts. Specifically, this chapter analyses the drivers of organisational change by giving heed to the ways that the external operating environment influences and shapes organisational change. Herein consideration is given to the role of coercive, normative and mimetic forces. Moreover, it examines how the work of volunteers and their interactions with service users are increasingly mandated by professionalisation (a project which has a very distinctive purpose and set of values with demands for accountability, legitimacy and improved efficiency and effectiveness at its centre). Finally, in each of the three sections, the analysis reveals the extent of the fall-out among volunteers and presents their collective fight to maintain their own, longstanding meanings of volunteering.

8.3 The significance of values

Findings from the empirical chapters revealed a significant interplay between the unique organisational characteristics of Helpline and the sources of volunteer commitment. As will be demonstrated throughout the following discussion, these two things are so deeply intertwined that it is often difficult to disentangle them. In other words, those attributes that make Helpline unique are the same attributes that contribute to the sense of felt commitment among volunteers. Data from chapter five revealed volunteers' perceptions of Helpline as uniquely driven by a core set of organisational values. These values are the first source of organisational uniqueness and volunteer commitment, and thus warrant further scrutiny and analysis. Findings show that, prior to organisational change, the specific and unique nature of these values were what made Helpline (and its service offering) fundamentally and unmistakably different from other services (see pp. 98-105). These values were defined and understood in relation to what the state cannot provide. Volunteers frequently contrasted the essence of these values (particularly the confidentiality, self-determination and non-judgemental values) with the principles that are applied in 'professional' state-funded counselling services (see table 8.3). In other words, Helpline's core values paved the way for volunteers' understandings of Helpline as a unique organisation with stark distinguishable differences from state-funded services (research question 1).

The differences that underpin the Helpline service and counselling services are essential for understanding how professionalisation is forcing Helpline to become more comparable to state-funded services (see table 8.3 below). ‘The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy’ (BACP), develops safe, ethical and competent practice. Herein, ethical frameworks are used to guide counsellors on issues of safeguarding, confidentiality and the need to disclose information that is considered to be in the public interest or individual protection. While counselling services have certain legal and moral obligations surrounding what they *must* or *ought* to do, Helpline volunteers, prior to organisational change, were circumscribed by organisationally imposed limits on what they *could* do for their callers. In other words, the extent to which volunteers could ‘help’ callers was limited. For example, Helpline’s self-determination value, centred around respect for the autonomy of the individual and their right to independent decision making. In other words, volunteers were by no means allowed to intervene in the lives of callers through action or advice; their task was to listen, encourage reflection and maintain the autonomy and self-determination of the caller. This required volunteers to resist any inclination to ‘rescue’ or ‘save’ the caller. Another distinguishable difference was in Helpline’s confidentiality value which inhibited volunteers from breaching confidentiality without explicit consent (even where doing so might have protected a caller or others from serious harm). Furthermore, unlike Helpline volunteers, qualified counsellors draw on a body of professional knowledge and their practice is based on learning as opposed to being acquired through everyday experience or based on innate ability (see section 6.4 on authenticity). As demonstrated here, Helpline’s values, are the nucleus of the organisation and its uniqueness; several volunteers expressed a strong sense of pride in their ‘front-line’ positions that enables their involvement in ‘work’ that is important, valuable and otherwise unavailable.

Value	Interpretation prior to organisational change	Empirical example	Interpretation of ‘professional’ counsellors
Confidentiality	<p>Absolute confidentiality regardless of content of call.</p> <p>Service users, including perpetrators of crime, will not be reported.</p>	<p><i>“Many volunteers feel that [Helpline] is an exceptional case from every other single institution and organisation in this country. Somehow, confidentiality takes precedence over anything else” [Elise p. 102]</i></p> <p><i>“...people think, just as a matter of principle, that [Helpline] should be private. It is a matter of ideology and principle... [Helpline] has always operated that way successfully, and so people think it should remain that way. If we forego our confidentiality promise, that changes how we work and we’ll need to unlearn things and discover a new way of working” [Malvin, p. 143]</i></p>	There are limits to confidentiality e.g., clients’ needs or the public interest may outweigh the general duty of confidentiality.
Self-determination	<p>Service users have absolute autonomy to make their own decisions.</p>	<p><i>“[we accept] that if somebody wants to take their own life, that is absolutely their decision and not ours. It is not our place to interfere” [Cali, p. 104]</i></p> <p><i>“...whomever that caller on the end of the phone is, it is their individual wishes that are our priority and our aim is to protect that caller. Regardless of who they are or what they have done. That is how we are different from other services” [Elise p. 102]</i></p>	Careful contracting from the outset with client, in which the exceptions to confidentiality are clarified, together with an explanation of what action may be made in circumstances such as risk of suicide.
Non-judgemental	<p>To adhere to the confidentiality and self-determination values, one must be entirely impartial regarding the caller and their circumstances.</p>	<p><i>“I have to stay neutral and keep my own counsel, and that’s not always easy. You have to stay calm and encourage the caller to be calm too. I am there to listen to them, not to judge them” [Imogen p. 116]</i></p> <p><i>“You don’t want to be in a position of judgement, and that is the whole ethos of [Helpline]. We are not people who are in a position to judge, whether we think that they are suitable to receive the service or not is irrelevant. [Alanna, p. 143]</i></p>	Judgements are used to assess whether a client’s GP, crisis team needs to be contacted in the case that they are at perceived risk of harm. Judgements are also used to assess whether relevant services/authorities need to be contacted if client is breaking the law.

Table 8. 3 Different value orientations between Helpline and state-funded counselling.

8.3.1 Commitment to values

Throughout interviews, volunteers acknowledged that some might regard Helpline's values as controversial or even unethical, this was reflected in the comments that volunteers relayed from family and friends such as: 'why would you want to do that?', 'paedophiles don't deserve that kind of protection' and 'is that even legal?'. Despite this, findings revealed that volunteers were steadfast in their commitment to Helpline's values and most worked extremely hard to uphold them during their interactions with callers (see section 6.2 and 6.4). This commitment continued even as Helpline underwent change and the values began to take on a 'new', or to put it more prudently, a more 'modernised' meaning.

Evidence of strong value alignment between volunteer's personal values and those of the organisation was uncovered through volunteers' descriptions of their reasons for joining Helpline over any other voluntary organisation (p. 137-139). An unsurprising finding given Kearney's (2001) assertion that the type of voluntary work that people choose to engage in, depends to a considerable extent, on their personal values. Moreover, one's values are inextricably linked to their beliefs and feelings; they underpin behaviour and serve as standards for judgement and decision-making while also transcending specific actions and situations (Schwartz 2012). Less conspicuous, the combination of these 'unconventional' or 'controversial' values signified to volunteers that they were a "a part of something special" and their salience increased as volunteers continued to operationalise them, thus further strengthening value alignment and the sense of belonging and purpose that volunteers experienced.

Chapter six indicated that many volunteers had formed an affective attachment to, and identification with, the organisation's values and goals (Bang et al 2012; Stride and Higgs 2013; Gatignon-Turnau and Mignonac 2015). The Helpline role, for many volunteers, became a way of life and a central component of their self-perceptions and self-definitions (see chapter 6). Such analysis was interpreted from volunteer accounts that referred to their volunteering as a fundamental part of their existence (see section 6.4.3). Volunteers incorporated their voluntary work (and the values that underpin it) into their self-concepts and thus, formed a role-identity (Van Dyne and Farmer 2005). For many in this study, it appeared that the sense of self that volunteers derived from their roles would be damaged if they ceased volunteering (Gronlund 2011); this was reflected in comments such as: "I can't see any reason why I would stop, it is who I am"; "I shall probably be here until I pop my clogs, it's like another family" and "It does become a part of you... it really shapes you into a certain type of person" (see pages 120-126 for more empirical examples). For these

volunteers, their voluntary work virtually defined who they were; supporting the proposition set out in chapter three that some role-identities are more salient for individuals' self-conceptions than others (McCall and Simmons 1978; Rosenberg 1979; Stryker 1980; Thoits 1992; Weigert et al 1986). Unequivocally, Helpline became the vehicle through which a significant number of volunteers could perform and confirm their personal identities because through their work, they were able to enact their own, deeply held beliefs and values. Moreover, membership to Helpline empowered volunteers to be the person they felt they were or wanted to be, morally, and thus, the role became identity-affirming. This analysis suggests that the decision to become a volunteer grew out of an identity, and an identity grew out of volunteering.

The question of "who one is" involves aligning oneself with values, which in turn constitutes one's personal identity. Those values then serve as referents that transverse multiple situations and an individual who feels as though their core values are satisfied, will feel a higher sense of self-esteem (Hitlin 2007). Helpline gave volunteers the opportunity to enact their personal identities, in doing so, volunteers were able to live up to their important, guiding constructs and establish positive self-identities that bolstered their self-esteem and self-worth. This analysis was interpreted from extracts such as: "I think that because I am a [Helpline] volunteer, the world is a better place" and "it really is such a profound and special thing. It's like a little miracle working when it happens". As Ashforth (2016: 362) postulates, identification "is the means through which the individual becomes a microcosm of the organization" wherein "the organization takes root in the hearts and minds of those who identify with it, enabling them to enact its purpose, values, beliefs, and so on" (Ashforth 2016: 362). This idea of the organisation "taking root" in its members' hearts and minds, did indeed, apply to Helpline volunteers. This was particularly evident in volunteers' accounts of how Helpline's organisational values became ingrained and embedded within the psyches of many volunteers. Accounts included: "those values define not only our roles here, but also how we see our personal selves, outside"; "they start to inform the way that you are and how you approach issues more broadly" and "the values here have changed how many of us volunteers see the wider world". This suggests that Helpline's values transverse volunteers' roles in that they have infiltrated the way individuals perceive and view the world, outside of the organisation.

To this end, as autonomous agents responsible for enacting the organisational values, volunteers derived an understanding of who they were, as individuals, based on their membership to Helpline (Herman 1998; von Essen 2016). In other words, through their

membership, volunteers felt confirmed as ‘empathic and non-judgemental’ active listeners who saw real value in offering a confidential service where people could make their own decisions and choices. This analysis helps us to understand and conceptualise the extremely high levels of volunteer commitment thus advancing a more nuanced explanation of the current literature that suggests that those who are affectively committed will likely continue their organisational membership because they ‘want’ to do so (Meyer and Allen 1991; Stephens et al 2004). Moreover, this study extends the identity-volunteering link by including the relationship of values as distal, organising influences on identities; suggesting a strong interplay between one’s personal identity and one’s role identity in the context of volunteering. These findings provide valuable insights into how voluntary organisations can harness the ‘emotional attachment’ of volunteers to enhance volunteer retention and thus, could be useful for practitioners and policy makers (Bang et al 2012; Gatignon-Turnau and Mignonac 2015; Stride and Higgs 2013).

8.3.2 Inherent conflict 1: Value disruption

As in extant literature, volunteering at Helpline was theorised as an opportunity for volunteers to live their values and express a core aspect of the self (Wuthnow 1991; Reich 2000; Haski-Leventhal and Cnaan 2009). However, the recent organisational changes, particularly the implementation of safeguarding, impeded this. For volunteers, safeguarding changed the nature and meaning of Helpline’s values; a problematic finding in the current context where volunteers derive a sense of meaning, purpose and identity from their involvement (described above). Volunteers spoke candidly about how this new policy threatened and compromised Helpline’s long-established confidentiality, self-determination and non-judgemental values (see table 8.3). Safeguarding requires volunteers to, in certain circumstances, report a caller’s case to a safeguarding officer, without the caller’s consent. These new ‘exceptions’ to Helpline’s ‘impenetrable’ values are a complete departure from previous ways of working; reflecting the model of work that is used in ‘professional’, state-funded counselling services and thus, blurring the distinction between the purpose of a statutory organisation and unique organisations like Helpline.

It is reasonable to infer that the implementation of the safeguarding policy reflected Helpline’s desire to satisfy the expectations of external stakeholders, namely government. This supposition is supported by the recent policy focus that has centred on a reduction in suicides (see: DoH 2012; National Assembly for Wales 2015; Northern Ireland Assembly

2012; Scottish Government 2013). These government guidelines, from across the four UK nations, have created a context in which, those delivering mental health services, must work; the implication is that suicide prevention and reduction should be a priority for all. Helpline's former promise of 'absolute confidentiality' and 'self-determination' would have been entirely incompatible with the suicide prevention targets set out by government, which would likely have hindered their chances of securing funding. Safeguarding thus, enabled the repositioning of Helpline as an organisation that can effectively contribute to this wider cause. Herein, Helpline is presented as a professional and attractive organisation that is, like larger voluntary and state organisations, capable of effectively responding to the issue of mental health. The new policy symbolises Helpline's desire to legitimise itself as an ethical organisation, that espouses 'good practice'. Legitimacy is gained when a VO is seen to operate in accordance with "a particular set of rules or standards" (Collingwood's (2006: 444). By demonstrating that the values, beliefs and successes of Helpline are commensurate with stakeholder expectations and demands (Gray et al 1995), the organisation is embroiled in a "legitimacy game" (Gill and Wells 2014: 27); reflecting a new focus on "accountability upwards" (Ebrahim 2003: 314).

Many who investigate the changing accountability environment within the sector acknowledge the detrimental impact it can have on organisational mission, activities and values (Ebrahim 2003; Christensen and Ebrahim 2006; Jones 2007; O'Dwyer and Unerman 2008; Hudson 2010; Bennett and Savani 2011; Billis 2010; Milbourne 2013; Rochester 2013; Agyemang et al 2017). These consequences are often couched in terms of 'mission drift' and are seldom further investigated. Instead, such consequences are often unreflectively dropped into studies without further examination of what, specifically, causes 'mission drift', how it affects the functioning of VOs or what the consequences are for those who are responsible for adapting to the new ways of working (usually volunteers). Findings from this thesis revealed that the changing nature of Helpline's values had significant consequences for the way volunteers understood and perceived the meaning of their efforts. The 'homogenous or distinct?' subtheme (section 7.3) captured volunteers' understandings of professionalisation as compromising Helpline's core values and analysis suggests that this led to value incongruence where the alignment between volunteers' and Helpline's values was disrupted by the introduction of new organisational procedures.

This disruption led to widespread dissatisfaction and resistance among volunteers where some questioned whether they wanted to continue their membership and others withdrew certain elements of their labour to express their dissatisfaction (see pages 140-144).

Such formal and overt resistance was less common than the more subtle forms which included ‘deviations’ to practice. For example, some volunteers admitted to implementing their own, individual strategies when providing support, such as ‘warning’ callers when their discussion headed towards ‘referral territory’. This, according to volunteers, made policy changes more palatable and comfortable and helped volunteers to manage the changes to practice that they disagreed with (see pages 142-144). This was a way for volunteers to reassert their own values so that they could continue to *be* the people they felt they were or wanted to be, morally, and thus, through these resistance strategies volunteers were able to maintain their sense of identity (research question 3). This analysis, however, raises questions about the longevity of volunteers being able to operate in a way that they deem ‘better’ or more ‘suitable’. There is an ever-present risk that Central Charity may implement sanctions or deterrents in order to tighten their control over volunteers and bring them back in line with organisationally acceptable standards; a particular concern for how this will affect volunteer meaning and identity going forward (depicted in the ‘individual level’ of the conceptual framework).

8.4 Volunteers’ substantial involvement

Central to volunteers’ conceptualisations of Helpline as a distinctive organisation that was unmistakably different from other voluntary and statutory organisations was its volunteer-led organisational structure. The importance, for volunteers, of being volunteer-led was highlighted throughout the empirical chapters; where the nature of involvement was framed as a distinct way of working. This unique organisational structure afforded volunteers high levels of participation, autonomy and involvement in organisational matters and decision-making. Moreover, it enabled volunteers to take active and lead roles in a range of tasks from: service delivery; administration and decision-making; outreach work, including community engagement and partnership collaboration, to less arduous yet still significant contributions such as: tending to branch buildings; managing websites; brand development; training and induction and collecting donations at events. The significant range of tasks reveal the breadth and depth of volunteer involvement. Furthermore, the informality of involvement (achieved through the structure) fostered multiple pathways for engagement and placed the emphasis on action where every member got involved in the ‘doing’ of the work. This structure was also a source of commitment among volunteers, again revealing the

significant interplay and deeply intertwined nature of Helpline's uniqueness and volunteer commitment (outlined in section 8.2.1).

Einolf (2018) notes, most of the literature concerned with volunteers and volunteer management addresses organisations that have a small number of volunteers and a large number of paid staff. Contrastingly, Helpline's structure was characterised by volunteers as 'amateur', 'grassroots' and 'informal'; a structure that was reinforced for more than 60 years. This conceptualisation of Helpline's structure is substantiated by its 21,000 volunteers relative to its 150 members of paid staff; representing the ubiquitous presence of volunteers throughout every layer of the hierarchy (see section 5.2). Organisations that are similarly structured have elsewhere in the literature been referred to as: community organisations (Einolf 2018), grassroots associations (Smith 2000) and voluntary associations (Paine et al 2010b). Organisations that are structured this way are, according to Billis (2010), an 'ideal type' of organisation within the sector. They constitute a special, fundamentally different way of working. Their commonality resides in the way that they are structured which tends to rely (almost) solely on volunteers. While a small number of paid staff may be employed in these organisations, volunteers remain dominant both in numbers, and most importantly, in decision-making, power and authority. These distinctive features were central in Helpline and are important for understanding the meanings that volunteers ascribe to the organisation (see chapter four for history of Helpline and volunteer involvement). Writing about the changing nature of volunteering within voluntary associations, Paine et al (2010b: 105) states: "While paid staff may be introduced to perform certain tasks, volunteers are the owners of associations; they are the beginning and end of the organization... volunteers identify closely with the organization and are strongly committed to its aims and values". This idea of an organisation beginning and ending with volunteers was uncovered within Helpline; reflected in several data extracts. Firstly, in the accounts of volunteers (particularly long-serving volunteers) regarding their considerable involvement in the establishment of new branches (p. 95), secondly, in volunteers' accounts of their dedication, hard work and effort in the creation and development of the Helpline 'brand' (p. 96) and finally, through their accounts of loss in discussions about bringing paid employees into branches (p. 133).

8.4.1 Commitment to autonomy

For many volunteers, their membership to Helpline was experienced positively because the structure empowered them through autonomy, considerable involvement and responsibility.

The organisational structure reaffirmed the sense of purpose and belonging experienced by volunteers and thus further strengthened self-esteem and self-worth (see section 8.2.1). The substantial involvement of volunteers manifested a sense of possession and ownership over their roles, the branch and by extension, the work output and service provided. This was interpreted from the numerous volunteer accounts which used personal pronouns such as “ours, us and we” to describe the organisation, the branch and the work. Here it is useful to apply Pierce et al’s (2001) theory of psychological ownership to analyse volunteer involvement. In chapter three, the work of Pierce et al (2001) was introduced and their concept of psychological ownership was described as occurring when an individual develops possessive feelings over a specific ‘target’ which could be an object, concept, organisation or other person (Van Dyne and Pierce 2004).

The concept of psychological ownership has almost exclusively occurred where work is paid for (Ainsworth 2020), however, the construct offers valuable insights into a range of volunteer behaviours. Applying the concept of psychological ownership to Helpline serves to explain why volunteers developed possessive feelings towards a variety of ‘targets’. Studies indicate that feelings of possession and ownership are more prevalent amongst ‘targets’ that align with the individual's self-identity (Pierce et al 2001; Jussila et al 2015). In other words, the reflection of the self in the target is recognised as a pre-cursor in the development of psychological ownership. Arguably, the concept of psychological ownership has particular relevance in the context of VOs (perhaps more so than in paid work contexts where it has almost exclusively been adopted), particularly where volunteers derive a sense of identity from their membership, as is the case here. According to Pierce et al (2001), there are three ways in which organisational members come to feel ownership, they are, controlling the target, coming to intimately know the target and investing the self in the target. Here, I will delineate how each of these routes emerged throughout this research and how they each gave rise to feelings of ownership. Within Helpline, there are examples of both: organisation-based and job-based psychological ownership. The former refers to one’s sense of ownership towards an organisation and the latter refers to one’s feelings of ownership towards his or her specific job or role (Dawkins et al 2017).

The first route to psychological ownership, controlling the target, was particularly evident in the discussions of being a volunteer-led organisation. Helpline’s structure gave volunteers high levels of perceived control, demonstrated in extracts such as: “volunteers are the ones who have developed the service into what it is today” and “if it wasn’t for volunteers, there would be no brand” (see section 5.2 for more empirical examples).

Additionally, high levels of perceived control were facilitated by the prominence of volunteer discretion, exhibited in the accounts that refer to the use of lived experience, emotion and authenticity in the support that callers are offered (see section 6.4 for empirical examples). Finally, the organisational culture of Helpline, particularly the physical absence of management whilst on duty, similarly allowed for ‘control of the target’ because it enabled a discourse of “our organisation” and “our branch” to emerge. Where such high levels of perceived control are present, the target tends to become a part of the person’s extended self (Belk 1988), as depicted throughout chapter 6 (specifically pages 115-118).

The second route to psychological ownership, ‘intimate knowledge’, refers to the information and knowledge that an individual possesses about a target. Intimate knowledge in the context of Helpline is interpreted as: volunteers’ understandings of callers’ needs, volunteers’ understandings of the various factors that could cause a person to experience distress or despair and, most importantly, volunteers’ understandings of how to effectively support service users. Data suggests that Helpline volunteers developed ‘intimate knowledge’ in two primary ways. The first, was through Helpline’s induction and ongoing training, wherein intimate knowledge appeared to be a prerequisite for appointment (and an ongoing requirement for effective call handling thereafter). The second way that volunteers developed intimate knowledge was through their intimate closeness to callers and their anguish (pp. 107-126) as well as through volunteers’ own lived experiences (pp. 120-127). Sustained commitment amplifies and refines intimate knowledge among the volunteer workforce, deepening the relationship between the self and the object (organisation) and giving rise to a heightened sense of possession (Rantanen and Jussila 2011).

The third route to psychological ownership, ‘investing the self into the target’, maintains that the investment of a person’s time, ideas, skills and energies can lead an individual to feel that ‘the target of ownership flows from the self’ and thus, refers to the extent to which individuals commit themselves to the target (Pierce et al 2001: 302). Chapter 6 (specifically pages 113-118) depicted many empirical examples of the various ways in which volunteers personally invest in their roles, for example, through their giving of time, ideas, effort, skills, and physical, psychological and intellectual energies (section 6.4.2). Such investments can give rise to feelings of ownership over the work (emotional labour); the products of labour (the service offering) and the equipment used to perform their roles (the branch/duty room). Volunteers reported that their interactions with callers often required them to give everything they had, both emotionally and cognitively, to the caller. Such calls require individuals to exercise higher discretion because volunteers invest “more of their own

ideas, unique knowledge and personal style” (Pierce et al 2001: 302). This appeared to result in stronger psychological ownership over the target. In other words, investing ‘self’, according to volunteers, led to feelings that the organisation and the service it provided was an extension of the self.

8.4.2 Inherent conflict 2: Marginalisation of volunteers

Data revealed that Helpline’s organisational restructure had resulted in the replacement of the (highly valued) volunteer-led approach with a more formal, bureaucratic one, wherein control was centralised. Herein the second inherent conflict emerges as expressed in the labelling of section 7.2 of this thesis, ‘centralised control or volunteer-led?’. This theme revealed how Helpline had restructured in light of external pressures. External pressures, Paine et al (2010b) notes, have been driving voluntary organisations in the direction of bureaucracy at the expense of associational features. This thesis supports these observations but advances understanding by examining the implications for volunteers, of losing the purported ‘associational features’ (Broadfoot et al 2008; Musick and Wilson 2008; Smith and Greenwood 2014; Mackenzie et al 2015; Wilks 2016; Smith et al 2018).

By the late 1980s, as observed by Smith et al (1995), structural changes were typical practice among larger voluntary organisations. Helpline, in every respect (e.g., income, number of volunteers, geographic distribution), would legitimately be considered a large charitable organisation. However, as analysed above, Helpline had not always functioned as one; preferring instead, to maintain its ‘amateur’ and ‘grassroots’ organisational characteristics. At the time of data collection though, each of Helpline’s 201 branches were in the process of restructuring which required them to either a) go through an incorporation process and affiliate to the Central Charity or b) join the Central Charity, thereby giving up their status as separate legal entities (see chapter four for full overview of restructure). It appeared, at this point, that Helpline was indeed embarking upon a restructuring process that many other voluntary organisations had already experienced.

Central to the restructure, according to volunteers, was the centralisation of power and control which was a response to Helpline’s changing accountability environment. Evident in the various accounts was a narrative of division between ‘us’ (volunteers, who, continued to prioritise and represent service users) and ‘them’ (Central Charity, who, increasingly prioritised and represented the demands of government and funders). This demonstrates an awareness among volunteers of Helpline’s growing obligation to justify its activities in a way

that satisfies the expectations of multiple, and sometimes competing stakeholders. This finding is consistent with Harmer et al's (2013) observation that political institutions may require voluntary organisations to implement business-like structures to fulfil accountability needs. Helpline's organisational restructure appeared to be management's endeavour to assume control of "independent and autonomous" branches (pp. 131-132). Volunteers supposed that this was an attempt (by management) to enhance cohesion and uniformity across the organisation and to "overcome the challenge of self-governing branches acting independently" [Dan, 5 years, p. 132]. These perceptions reflect the comments of Paine et al (2010b: 98) who, in their consideration of the effects of professionalisation, state: "Rather than necessarily dominating numerically, paid staff appear to be dominating strategically". This was evidenced in volunteer extracts regarding the changing direction of power and communication and there was a sense that paid staff were brought into the organisation to make and enforce strategic decisions (pp. 131-134).

In what Hill and Stevens (2011) describe as the 'staff-supported organisation', volunteers have both strategic control over the organisation and overall responsibility for volunteer management (See figure 8.1 below). In this conceptualisation, paid staff carry out some of the day-to-day operations of volunteer management such as coordinating rotas and communicating with volunteers. These organisations are often relatively small and have only a handful of paid staff, however, Helpline is an example of this kind of structure on a larger scale. The conceptualisations presented in figure 8.1 are useful for understanding Helpline's former position as a 'staff-supported' organisation and the shifting responsibilities of volunteers following organisational change (which appear to better reflect the conceptualisations under 'staff-led' organisations).

	Type of organisation	Level of voluntary volunteer management
Primarily volunteer-led	Volunteer-led and run	Volunteers organise themselves. Mutual support. Relatively flat structure of 'management' but likely to have a volunteer 'leader'
	Staff-supported organisations	Strategic decisions and overall responsibility for volunteer management lies with volunteers. Paid staff are involved in the day-to-day operations of volunteer management.
Primarily staff-led	Volunteer-supported organisations	Volunteers are involved in day-to-day volunteer management but strategic decisions and overall responsibilities lie with paid staff.
	Volunteer-involving organisations	Volunteers involved in operational and service delivery tasks. Little or no volunteer involvement in management or strategic decision-making around volunteer management

Figure 8. 1 A typology of volunteer involvement (Ockenden et al 2011)

The restructure was an example of how Central Charity had positioned Helpline as a competitive and attractive provider of services. The now centrally defined aims, objectives and targets appeared to be an attempt to streamline coordination, control and the implementation of change. Moreover, the formalisation of Helpline's structure enabled management to demonstrate an attentiveness to the 'rules' of the contracting environment, which would in turn, would place the organisation on the radar of government and funders to enable them to compete for funding (Graddy and Morgan 2006; Harmer et al 2013). The restructure, therefore, is indicative of Helpline's greater reliance on diversified income where revenue increasingly comes from multiple sources, including national and local governments, public bodies and partnerships (Carroll and Stater 2009). This reflects the move to revenue diversification that has been witnessed throughout the sector to avoid excessive dependence on a single source of funding (Froelich 1999; Hodge and Piccolo 2005). As examined in chapter two of this thesis, the unspecified and flexible distribution of funding to the sector is largely a thing of the past; the allocation of funding to voluntary organisations is now subject to strict compliance requirements and is awarded for specific types and levels of service provision (Moxham 2013; Furneaux and Ryan 2015; Morris et al 2015).

These changes signify the increased control and influence that government and funders have over the sector's activities (see chapter 2 for full review). In the attempt of Central Charity to showcase Helpline as an attractive provider, Helpline, like many other voluntary organisations, is (to some extent) inadvertently complicit (and thereby contributing) in the increasingly intense competitive funding environment (Stace and Cumming 2006). Like many VOs, Helpline is trapped in its relationship with the state as it is simultaneously confronted with an increasing need for funding and greater demands for services. The irony is that the state will (inadvertently) end up destroying the thing it arguably, most needs to capture, that is, the presence of an alternative service provision.

Data extracts were replete with the sense that the personal subjective experience of volunteering was deeply meaningful in the hearts and minds of volunteers (section 6.4.3), but these feelings were undermined by the restructure and led to a collective sense of disempowerment. The restructure thus, was central to volunteers' experiences because it fundamentally changed the way Helpline engaged and related to its volunteers. The replacement of local autonomy and control with greater bureaucracy was resisted by volunteers, because for them, it signalled their diminishing control, autonomy and involvement in decision-making. Volunteers indicated that restructuring was symbolic of central office taking away the former, and highly valued, 'amateur' and 'grassroots' core that

had previously characterised branches and they feared their involvement would be diminished. Many volunteers perceived that management had effectively displaced them as owners, members or even co-producers of the organisation and redefined them as mere resources.

The restructure, moreover, disrupted volunteers' understandings of Helpline's organisational identity, which in the past, had been perceived as a collection of volunteers' identities. The sense that organisational identity was being eroded was reflected in volunteers' beliefs that, what was once central, distinctive and enduring about the organisation was now being compromised (Albert and Whetten 1985). This was particularly evident in extracts such as these: "I don't want us to lose our heart and I don't want us to lose our ethos" and "I feel that we are being slowly eroded to conform with the rules and ideas of the larger sector and we are losing sight of our core values". This in turn, negatively affected the sense of purpose and identity that volunteers derived from their membership, which was largely shaped by their (previous) substantial involvement in the organisation (pp. 131-134). Furthermore, management's desire to establish control over volunteers and branches, while at the same time promoting its volunteer-led approach through various communication channels, was, interpreted by many volunteers as insulting and inauthentic. This suggests that there was a tension in terms of what management say the organisation is and what they are actually willing to allow to happen. The analysis here suggests that professionalisation is occurring at the expense of highly valued organisational attributes such as informality and flexibility. These findings are consistent with the limited number of studies that have found that bureaucracy has a negative effect on the experience of volunteering (Karr 2001; Barnes and Sharpe 2009; Stirling et al 2011).

Although the professionalisation phenomenon holds certain benefits for voluntary organisations, such as growth and efficiency (Dekker 2009), this research suggests that it may lessen the voluntary spirit and lead to diminished participation and commitment (see conceptual framework). These findings confirm Ganesh and McAllum's (2012) observation that professionalisation has repercussions for volunteers' own practices and identities and there are evident risks and unintended negative consequences. The former informal approach appears to be a viable and advantageous organising approach for volunteer engagement. The analysis thus, cautions about the effects of professionalisation; practitioners and policy makers need to recognise that, to some extent, the good practice principles that have emerged in some kinds of organisation could remain unattractive or irrelevant to some voluntary organisations. The high level of skills and experience of volunteers in primarily volunteer-led

organisations should be acknowledged and there needs to be a wider recognition that attempts to colonise this part of the sector with formal practices may be inappropriate and misguided.

8.5 The authenticity of lived experience

The final aspect that was central to volunteers' conceptualisations of Helpline as a distinctive organisation was the prominent role of authenticity in their encounters with 'callers'. The preceding sources of volunteer commitment and organisational uniqueness (value-driven and volunteer-led) culminate here insofar as they enabled volunteers to draw on their lived experiences to offer an authentic service to callers. As will be demonstrated throughout, authenticity was also a source of commitment among volunteers, again reaffirming the significant interplay and deeply intertwined nature of Helpline's uniqueness and volunteer commitment (outlined in section 8.2.1). The second central theme developed in chapter 6, 'authentic emotion work', captured the importance (for volunteers and service users respectively) of giving and receiving an authentic expression of empathy and emotion. This understanding of the volunteer role relates to the nature of the volunteer donation (research question two). Volunteers conceptualised their giving of empathy and emotion as a 'gift' and this gift was what made the service utterly distinctive and irreplaceable; state services that aim to provide something similar will likely never be able to replicate these elements because volunteers bestow their authenticity freely, as an expression of the 'type' of people that they are. Moreover, that this 'gift' was freely given and no financial transaction governed it was significant in marking this encounter out as distinctive. Volunteers perceived their giving of time and effort to be the most valuable form of donation, more so than "simply donating money" because, according to volunteers, the gift of time and 'connection' reaches individuals directly and supports them at the moment in time they most require it. These findings are interpreted as a rejection of the prediction that agents only care about the value of their donation, and not the manner in which it is given.

8.5.1 Commitment to authenticity

An integral aspect of 'authenticity' in volunteers' accounts was the role of lived experience. Data revealed that, among volunteers, a sense of personal life crisis was often linked to their decisions to become Helpline members. Such crisis emerged from different experiences, particularly a sense of loss; the death of a loved one, a broken marriage or a loss of job, identity or retirement. These experiences drove many volunteers to the brink of despair and

some admitted to being users of the service during their darkest times. It was for these experiences, that volunteers felt able to ‘give self’ and ‘emotions’ authentically. Volunteers believed that their lived experiences placed them in a unique and valuable position to offer callers ‘credible’ knowledge and support. Aside from highlighting the importance of personal experience, volunteers created a hierarchy of knowledge where lived experiences were elevated above learned, professional knowledge; further demarcating the role of the Helpline volunteer from the role of counsellors. Interpretation of the shared sense of experience and common humanity suggests that a unified sense of ‘us’ and ‘ours’ among volunteers and their callers facilitated a deep emotional connection between the caller and volunteer. In other words, formal learning was relegated, in the minds of volunteers, in favour of the sensed, the felt, the experienced. Put simply, the ‘gift’ of authenticity in the caller-volunteer interaction is predicated on the lived experiences of the latter. This is markedly different from the counsellor-client relationship in state settings which is primarily contingent upon, and influenced by, a specific, formally articulated job role and official qualifications. For Helpline volunteers, the qualification is indeed lived experience, meaning that the nature of the service encounter in each of these two settings is fundamentally different insofar as the Helpline service is based on the gift of human kindness.

Despite ‘authentic emotion work’ being described as emotionally arduous and challenging by volunteers, they also associated the ‘giving’ of their emotions with being intrinsically connected with some of the best and most rewarding aspects of the role and thus, were resolute in their commitment to providing the service in this way. When volunteers drew on their lived experience in their interactions with callers, they not only fulfilled the ideal visions they had of themselves, but they also felt that they were supporting callers in the most valuable way. Thus, volunteer authenticity led to effective and successful interactions which again, further engendered a sense of meaning and purpose in volunteers’ lives. This experience in turn, enhanced the volunteer experience; restored their commitment and affirmed their identities.

8.5.2 Inherent conflict 3: A fight for authenticity

The recent organisational changes, particularly the implementation of technological change and the mentoring scheme, have altered the nature and meaning of ‘authentic emotion work’ for volunteers. These new organisational practices are disrupting how volunteers carry out their work and how they interact with service users. These changes indicate an attempt to

imitate the distanced relationships found in counsellor-client interactions. Findings revealed that these seemingly ‘smaller’ changes, which appear to be modernising the service offering, are in effect, fundamentally shifting the relationship between volunteers and service users. Rather than viewing these changes as a way of modernising, volunteers are interpreting them as threatening the meaning of the organisation in terms of how it was conceived and founded. In other words, the organisation, the nature of its service of offering and its identity are in danger of disappearing.

The delivery of support via SMS and email has required volunteers to adapt *how* they listen to callers and thus contradict volunteers’ understandings (gleaned from their training and socialisation) of how to ‘actively listen’. The tenets of active listening (see section 5.3), according to volunteers, become obsolete for these new methods of delivery due to the different mechanisms that underpin written and verbal communication. The new, written methods of communication were criticised by volunteers for being: “too restrictive and circular”, “less helpful”, “more superficial” and “less intimate”. Moreover, volunteers were frustrated that they were unable to utilise taught techniques such as silence, tone of voice and “non-verbal nods and sounds” (a prerequisite when supporting callers on the phone). These criticisms have the cumulative effect of preventing volunteers from exploring feelings in the same depth that the telephone allows, thereby altering the delivery of empathy, and the expression of authenticity that comes with that. Given that the commitment and identity of volunteers is driven by their ability to ‘help’ people through an ‘authentic’ expression of empathy, technological change is obstructing that. Volunteers’ accounts indicated that they felt disenfranchised about the way ‘help’ appears to constitute something different with these more recent forms of communication and consequently, the ‘listening’ and ‘human contact’ values have taken on a different meaning.

The implementation of the E-log system was linked, by volunteers, to the safeguarding policy, where the former functions as a supportive process for the latter. For these volunteers, it seems that the entire purpose of the E-log is to enable the organisation to generate an externally driven picture of the number of safeguarding cases it has and the number of people that the organisation ‘helps’ or ‘saves’. This change reflects the increased emphasis that has been placed on the VS by funders to report, document and communicate organisational performance and outcomes (Ryan et al 2014; Connolly et al 2015). In other words, this change appears to be a new mode of control wherein governments have specified the outcomes they want to achieve (see forementioned government guideline on suicide reduction p. 169) and translate them into performance metrics using VOs as the vehicle. The

human drive for authenticity and the potential for tension between this and organisational control has become a major research focus in organisation studies (Costas and Fleming, 2009; Menard and Brunet, 2011; Fleming and Sturdy, 2011; Costas and Taheri, 2012; Westwood and Johnston, 2012). However, the consequences of this tension appear to have bypassed volunteers and it is here that this research contributes. This is arguably of particular concern given that volunteers, unlike paid employees, are not bound to the organisation by the usual ties of employment (Kim et al 2009). This suggests that if volunteers do not authentically feel that their membership of the organisation is part of who they ‘really’ are, the likelihood that they will leave is increased.

The new E-log system was a source of dissatisfaction for many volunteers due to its perceived limitations such as: its inability to identify important, emerging trends; its abstract and ‘tick box’ nature; its inadequacy and the confusion that can occur when inputting data (see page 150-151). These criticisms resonate with the critical literature that highlights the challenges of measuring performance in the VS, such as, the intangible nature of many services and the ambiguous and aspirational nature of VOs’ goals that make assessment difficult (Dacombe 2011). Volunteers expressed concern that the E-log had affected the emotional connection with callers. By streamlining reporting in this way, volunteers felt that their relationship with callers had become more robotic and “clunky” as they seek to ask questions that reflect the available options presented in the E-log rather than letting the conversation organically flow. The meaningfulness of interactions is reduced, which is where volunteers derive a sense of purpose and meaning in their own lives (Rosso et al 2010). Volunteers reported that they no longer felt that they were the ones who had a direct impact on people’s lives because coercive pressures are forcing interactions to become more transactional and impersonal. This in turn, is changing the meaning that volunteers ascribe to their activity, particularly in an existential sense. In other words, the value and significance that volunteers attach to their activity lessens as their interactions become increasingly mandated by ‘professionalisation’ (see conceptual framework for how these two interdependent worlds interact).

Finally, the introduction of mentoring was also viewed negatively by volunteers. The purpose of it, volunteers believed, was to enable central office to present the organisation as one that provides a consistent, high standard service. A few volunteers compared the programme to the appraisal process found in employment (p. 135) and the language of many volunteers indicated the influence of normative pressures, in their acknowledgements of “competency frameworks” and the need to “measure and assess performance”. Here, it

appears that Helpline is applying generic management control frameworks that have been designed for use in the public and private sectors (Aiken and Bode 2009; Carnochan et al 2014; Taylor and Taylor 2016). The influence of funders who increasingly call for the sector to improve its efficiency have been interpreted by Helpline as the need for enhanced training and the up-skilling of volunteers. This is consistent with the recent increased awareness of the need to better support and develop volunteers (McCormick and Donohue 2019; Alfes et al 2017).

Most volunteers felt disempowered by the mentoring programme, specifically, having their performance scrutinised was interpreted as unfair and unnecessary. Volunteers felt that this scrutiny equated to the organisation's rejection of volunteers' own lived experience as qualification enough to perform the role well. Several volunteers associated the mentoring scheme with Central Charity's lack of trust in volunteers (see pages 134-137). This lack of trust appeared to, in volunteers' minds, perpetuate the desire of Central Charity to increase control and surveillance, and was another way for the organisation to legitimise its activities and to validate itself to external bodies by evidencing that "quality control" was taken seriously. The scrutiny of volunteers' work is not only further diminishing the sense of control and autonomy that volunteers enjoyed but is also threatening their sense of purpose and identity; thereby affecting organisational commitment. This is consistent with other studies that suggests that professionalisation threatens the original purpose of the organisation by weakening their grassroots ties and forcing them to enact donor policy rather than follow their own agendas (Banks et al 2015; Evans et al 2005). The fight here, for volunteers, is a fight for authenticity. Volunteers want to be allowed to use lived experience and emotions freely (giving of self) but the set of rules, subscribed by the state, are inhibiting this authenticity.

8.6 Summary

The analysis presented here sheds light on the effect of professionalisation on one voluntary organisation that has a very distinctive purpose and set of values (specific to a crisis line setting). It analyses a series of inherent tensions and contradictions that arise between the interests of funders and those of volunteers and reveals an incompatibility between the external aspiration for standardised service provision, and the internal aspiration of volunteers to preserve Helpline's uniqueness and values. At the centre of this analysis, as depicted in the unique conceptual framework, is the notion of 'loss' and what organisations, like Helpline, could risk losing in their attempts to position themselves as 'alternative providers' of

services. This analysis suggests that voluntary organisations are increasingly being politicised and at the same time, are losing their identities. This research contributes a conceptual framework that fires a warning to voluntary organisations, the voluntary sector more broadly and the state.

For volunteers, Helpline is both, a source of self-identity and a deep repository of meaning and emotional attachment. This chapter reveals what happens to the ‘meaning’ of volunteering following change and professionalisation. More specifically, it explores how professionalisation threatens the sustained commitment of volunteers which is an important issue for volunteering studies since it concerns volunteer commitment and retention which is often tied to organisational survival (Brudney and Meijs 2009; Vecina et al 2012; Alfes et al 2014). Through an examination of organisational change, this thesis contributes to an acutely underdeveloped evidence base pertaining to volunteers’ experiences (Broadfoot et al 2008; Musick and Wilson 2008; Smith and Greenwood 2014; Mackenzie et al 2015; Wilks 2016; Smith et al 2018). I have sought to show how the experiences of volunteers are negatively affected by Helpline’s attempts to mimic the approach of professional, state-funded counselling services in an attempt to enhance legitimacy, accountability and effectiveness. This chapter has revealed the blurring distinction between Helpline (a unique, alternative service) and statutory organisations. The consequences include: disrupted values, the marginalisation of volunteers and a fight for authenticity which results in a volunteer workforce that is dissatisfied, disenfranchised, displaced and disempowered as they oppose, resist and fight to retain the organisation’s uniqueness and the sense of meaning, purpose and identity that they derive from their membership.

The analysis examines the political relationship that is reshaping voluntary organisations such as Helpline, but raises some interesting questions about the moral relationship. In effect, the state, one could argue, is refashioning these organisations in its own image to exploit the availability of unpaid labour. In many respects relying on organisations such as Helpline, simply perpetuates the under-investment that many have criticised.

Chapter Nine: Conclusion

9.1 Introduction

This concluding chapter provides an opportunity to reflect on the purpose and contributions of the research, as well as the research process itself. The chapter begins with a succinct overview of each of the four main contributions of this research, before moving on to the ‘research reflections’, which considers how the research might have been done differently. Following this, the chapter concludes with an ‘opportunities for future research’ section. The aim of this thesis was to uncover the ‘meaning’ of volunteering for members of one voluntary organisation. More specifically, this thesis examined how organisational change impacts the meaning of volunteering for those who engage with it. This study has taken place at an interesting and challenging time for voluntary organisations; the backdrop of austerity and more specifically, a lack of funding for ‘Cinderella’ services, such as those targeting mental health, as well as the significance of the contract culture and the turbulent VS-state relationship, have been central in driving organisational change.

With virtually no interpenetration with organisation studies, there exists a relatively small, emergent specialist literature on volunteers and voluntary work. More narrowly, the experiences of volunteers, that is, what it is like to be a volunteer and how organisational matters influence volunteering, have suffered from a dearth of empirical research. Where studies of volunteering and voluntary work exist, they are almost exclusively concerned with the broader benefits of engagement for those who are involved, organisations and society more generally (Taylor 2005). Understanding the volunteer experience is necessary since it is often linked to the success and survival of VOs and because sector-wide change is ubiquitous, thus assuming that the volunteer experience is static or stable (as is frequently done) would be erroneous. This thesis examined three central research questions pertinent to the involvement of volunteers within Helpline – areas that, thus far, have remained distinctly underdeveloped in extant literature:

1. How do volunteers understand and conceptualise Helpline and are these meanings influenced by the crisis line environment that the organisation operates in?
2. How do volunteers understand and experience their roles and responsibilities within Helpline?
 - a. What constitutes the ‘work’ of a Helpline volunteer?

- b. What do those who volunteer for Helpline value about doing so?
3. How are externally driven organisational changes affecting volunteers' experiences and in what ways is resistance demonstrated?

The development of these questions arose from an examination of the literature on voluntary sector change (chapter 2) and the conceptual and existential meaning of volunteering (chapter 3). As I have shown, the literature has rather little to say about the interaction between these two interdependent worlds i.e., the external pressures and their effect on the internal functioning of VOs (more on this in section 9.2 contribution 1). In the context of this qualitative case study, I have provided an in-depth and nuanced understanding of the volunteer experience and how organisational change can impact it. Specifically, I developed three central themes, including: 'a distinctive, value-driven organisation'; 'authentic emotion work' and 'professionalisation as loss'. These, as well as the related sub-themes (see chapters five-seven) explain firstly, the interaction between the external and internal environments and secondly, *how* those engaged in volunteering experience organisational change. This thesis has been an attempt to analyse the meanings that volunteers attached to their work, their organisation and indeed, themselves. The rationale for this thesis emanated from the under-research nature of volunteers' experiences. More specifically, and particularly pertinent to the continued survival of VOs, was the unanswered question of what sustains people in their volunteer work (Alfes et al 2014). Chapter 3 exposed the need to understand how the volunteer experience changes over time and how this, in turn, effects the sustained involvement and commitment of volunteers.

9.2 Contribution 1: Unique conceptual framework

Via a unique conceptual framework (see figure 3.1), this research contributes to prevalent and timely debates that have long been ignored in voluntary sector studies. It does so by depicting the complex and interdependent relationship between the internal environment (the individual experience of volunteering) and the external environment (the drivers of organisational change). Within the framework, the first two levels (the sector and organisational levels) are relatively well trodden in extant literature, however, the uniqueness of this framework lies in the contribution it makes to providing insights into how these two levels affect the largely neglected area of the volunteer experience (third level). It achieves this by highlighting a series of challenges and inherent tensions that arise among volunteers during times of change

and uncertainty. In other words, the framework underscores some of the significant (and potentially detrimental) consequences that occur as a result of an increasingly interdependent sector-state relationship. Austerity and ‘professionalisation’ are key challenges that the voluntary sector faces; not only are managers of these organisations expected to navigate and adapt to a new landscape that is plagued with isomorphic pressures, but they too, must bid for contracts (a time-consuming and resource-intensive activity) while effectively managing volunteers and mediating the tensions that arise if their organisations are to survive and prosper.

Since many VOs are mostly or entirely staffed by volunteers, their centrality to organisational survival is indisputable. However, their unpaid efforts are a unique resource that need to be delicately managed in order to be retained. Role autonomy, control over organisational matters and discretion in decision making (pre organisational change) were all indicators of how volunteers (and their work) was highly valued by paid personnel. That these things were being taken away from volunteers in an attempt to assuage state-driven demands and pressures sent them a pejorative message, which had an adverse impact on the experiences of volunteers and how they perceived the meaning of their efforts. This in turn, led to tensions in the social order and widespread dissatisfaction and resistance among the workforce. Specifically, volunteers experienced a strong sense of loss attributable to the perceived erosion of Helpline’s ethos and identity as management continued in their quest to position the organisation as a competitive provider of services. Moreover, the involvement of volunteers had changed; management had effectively displaced them as owners, members or even co-producers of the organisation and redefined them as mere resources which resulted in weakened commitment. What this framework, and the research more broadly, provides that extant literature has failed to, is a nuanced theorisation of how the volunteer experience can change over time. It highlights that any significant change to context may serve to increase incidences of ‘value incongruence’ among the volunteer workforce. It reveals that (at best) volunteers will experience a period of adjustment to the changed ‘work’ environment as they evaluate the costs and benefits associated with their involvement. At worst, it reveals an increased likelihood of volunteers curtailing their involvement altogether. The framework cautions about the effects of professionalisation and serves as a warning to practitioners and policy makers of the need to recognise that, to some extent, the good practice principles that have emerged in some kinds of organisation could remain unattractive or irrelevant to some voluntary organisations. The high level of skills and experience of volunteers in primarily volunteer-led organisations should be acknowledged and there needs to be a wider

recognition that attempts to colonise this part of the sector with formal practices may be inappropriate and misguided.

The factors that contribute to a sense of loss among volunteers are not exhaustive and rather, are the most pertinent to the context of crisis volunteering where a) emotion work is central to the role and b) the identity of volunteers is intricately tied to their membership. This is not to say that these findings cannot be applied to other voluntary contexts, though generalisation should be exercised with caution, not least because the purpose of this research was to demonstrate how specific contextual factors impact the volunteer experience in a localised and situated setting. Moreover, voluntary organisations exist in very different contexts with distinct histories, cultures, and political traditions. However, generalisability is sometimes reached on the basis of recognition of findings from the reader or researcher. This framework and the concepts and theories that underpin it will likely resonate with many researchers who are investigating a myriad different volunteering aspects and voluntary contexts. For this reason, I posit that this framework has some degree of generalisability and value due to the context within which it occurs. For example, against the international backdrop of austerity, many VOs are being pressured to professionalise (a finding not limited to crisis settings) and thus, it is likely that some of the features of this study share commonalities with other domains. In a broad sense, the framework can be useful for understanding how isomorphic pressures and the politicisation of the sector pose significant challenges for the ways that volunteers ascribe meaning to their efforts. Furthermore, the framework allows for identification of the nature of the tensions that arise during periods of change and uncertainty. Through the inclusion of the ‘conceptual understanding’ and existential experience’ components of the framework, scholars of future research are encouraged to consider what volunteers find compelling about their specific organisations and whether change and uncertainty, including environmental and organisational pressures, are threatening these sources of commitment. The framework ultimately serves as a vehicle for understanding how the state-organisation relationship (particularly those that depend heavily on government funding) influences operating practices of VOs and enables identification of specific pressures that are being exerted on the organisation.

9.3 Contribution 2: Sustained commitment in a crisis line context

The second contribution to this thesis is a response to the frequently repeated, yet perpetually overlooked question of what sustains people in their volunteer work (Snyder and Omoto 2008; Valeau et al 2013; Alfes et al 2014). Firstly, crisis line volunteers, this thesis posits, are a distinct volunteer group. For this reason, their roles, the sources of their commitment and their experiences should be treated and understood as such. Accordingly, this research provides nuanced insights into the specific context of crisis lines. The importance of context was reflected in the framing of the research questions, for example: ‘How do volunteers understand and conceptualise Helpline and are these meanings influenced by the crisis line environment that the organisation operates in?’. Such specificity does not necessarily suggest that some of the insights gleaned from this study cannot be applied to other organisational contexts (particularly among those that recruit crisis volunteers), but I do not claim generalisability on the basis of the findings presented.

In scrutinising the organisational context, this thesis responds to Overgaard’s (2019) call for scholars to refrain from presenting volunteering as “one form of activity, not many forms”. The treatment of volunteering in extant literature, Overgaard (2019) argues, inhibits a logic that starts with the *kinds* of activity being carried out due to the generic and monolithic understandings that are presented regarding what constitutes a ‘volunteer’, ‘a voluntary activity’ and a ‘voluntary organisation’. Oppositely, this thesis acknowledges and examines the specific occupational and sectoral context within which volunteers operate. Moreover, the ‘crisis line’ context, this thesis discovered, is fundamental to its members’ experiences. Therefore, the sources of volunteer commitment, I suggest, are most likely exclusive to this specific context.

Chapter five revealed that Helpline is understood and conceptualised by its membership, as a distinctive, value-driven organisation. Analysis in chapter eight revealed a close association between the sources of Helpline’s uniqueness and the sources of volunteer commitment; these two things are so deeply intertwined that it is almost impossible to disentangle them. In other words, those attributes that make Helpline unique are the same attributes that contribute to the sense of felt commitment among volunteers; indicating that essentially, the target of volunteer commitment is the uniqueness of Helpline’s service offering (Meyer et al 2006). The three components of uniqueness/commitment include: volunteer autonomy and agency; value alignment and authenticity.

Prior to organisational change, the specific and unique nature of Helpline’s values were what made Helpline (and its service offering) fundamentally and unmistakably different

from other services (particularly state-funded services). Volunteers were proud to be on the ‘front-line’ delivering support to people that the state cannot or would not reach. In particular, the ‘controversial’ nature of Helpline’s unique values was pertinent because, volunteers felt, no other organisation or institution would be willing or comfortable providing a service that endorses complete confidentiality and absolute caller choice (as Helpline did). This signified to volunteers that they were a “a part of something special” and they consequently became affectively committed to the organisation and the work, increasingly so as they were socialised into operationalising its values (Bang et al 2012; Stride and Higgs 2013; Gatignon-Turnau and Mignonac 2015). The shared sense of experience and common humanity (between callers and volunteers) was at the core of the service offering and it was this that facilitated a deep emotional connection to the role and the organisation.

Moreover, the value alignment between volunteers’ personal values and those of the organisation meant that the Helpline role, for many, became a way of life and a central component of volunteers’ self-perceptions and self-definitions. Volunteers incorporated their voluntary work (and the values that underpin it) into their self-concepts and thus, formed a role-identity (Van Dyne and Farmer 2005). The organisation ultimately became the vehicle through which a significant number of volunteers could perform and confirm their identities by enacting their own, deeply held personal beliefs and values. The sense of purpose and identity that volunteers derived from their involvement was reinforced by the use of authenticity and volunteers’ lived experiences during interactions. In other words, membership to Helpline allowed volunteers to be the person they felt they were or wanted to be, morally, and thus, the role became identity-affirming. For many in this study, it appeared that the sense of self that volunteers derived from their roles would be damaged if they ceased volunteering (Gronlund 2011).

These findings contribute understandings to the various ways that volunteers experienced their volunteering efforts and sheds light on the factors that sustains them in their work (Barz 2001). Moreover, the explicit examination of Helpline illuminates the context of crisis hotlines, a necessary development according to Aguirre and Bolton (2013: 327) who comment that the “meagre research” in the context of crisis hotlines fails to differentiate findings from any other type of volunteer work.

9.4 Contribution 3: A refashioned relationship

The third contribution of this thesis relates to the ‘professionalisation’ debate that was firstly examined in chapter two and scrutinised further throughout the empirical chapters. Many who investigate the ‘professionalisation’ of the voluntary sector acknowledge the detrimental impact it can have on organisational mission, activities and values (Ebrahim 2003; Christensen and Ebrahim 2006; Jones 2007; O'Dwyer and Unerman 2008; Hudson 2010; Bennett and Savani 2011; Billis 2010; Milbourne 2013; Rochester 2013; Agyemang et al 2017). These consequences are often couched in terms of ‘mission drift’ and are seldom further investigated. Instead, such observations are often unreflectively dropped into studies without further examination of what, specifically, causes ‘mission drift’ or how it affects the functioning of VOs. The concept of ‘mission drift’, this thesis argues, fails to truly capture the consequences of professionalisation in organisations such as Helpline. This thesis contributes an understanding of the effect of professionalisation on one voluntary organisation that has a very distinctive purpose and set of values. It demonstrates how ‘professionalisation’, and the subsequent competing aspirations of funders (for standardised service provision) and volunteers (for the preservation of Helpline’s unique identity) causes a series of inherent tensions and contradictions within the case organisation (see chapter eight). Herein, the goals of government and those of organisational members emerge as antithetical and it is this dynamic that is at the heart of the inherent tensions and contradictions.

To overcome the criticism of professionalisation being used as “a catchall phrase embracing a plethora of unexamined changes” (Broadbridge and Parsons 2003: 729), this study investigated a series of specific organisational changes that Helpline was in the process of implementing at the time of data collection (see table 8.1 for an overview of Helpline’s specific changes). In doing so, this thesis categorised Helpline’s changes as ranging from structural changes, changes based on established good practice and changes that were managerialist in nature. The organisational context is again pertinent here insofar as, the issue of mental health provision has risen up the political agenda as demands for services, in recent years, have increased exponentially. Government has subsequently taken an increased interest in those organisations, like Helpline, who are responsible for delivering services that (either wholly or partly) reflect their mental health agendas. For those organisations that do not fully align with the aspirations of government (like Helpline), they are subject to increased and intensified pressures for conformity, accountability and legitimacy. The suggestion, therefore, is that rather than ‘retreating’, as is suggested in the literature in chapter two, the state appears in fact, to be changing its *modus operandi*.

This thesis reveals that organisational change has been implemented within Helpline to satisfy the various and evolving expectations of external stakeholders, namely government and funders. Management, located at Central Charity, have embarked on a process of ‘professionalisation’ to demonstrate an attentiveness to the ‘rules’ of the contracting environment in an attempt to position Helpline as a professional and attractive organisation that is comparable to other larger voluntary and state organisations, capable of effectively responding to the issue of mental health. This repositioning places Helpline on the radar of government and funders and in doing so, enables them to compete for funding while also enabling them to assume position on a national stage as skilled service providers, capable of influencing policy and practice. The political narrative of ‘suicide reduction’ across the four UK nations, has created a context in which, those delivering mental health services, must work; the implication is that suicide prevention and reduction should be a priority for all. The risk, this thesis reveals, is that voluntary organisations like Helpline are being driven in the direction of bureaucracy at the expense of their associational features. At the centre of this second contribution is the notion of ‘loss’ and what organisations, like Helpline, could lose in their attempts to position themselves as providers of services. This thesis posits that voluntary organisations are increasingly being politicised and at the same time, are losing their identities; thus, this research fires a warning to voluntary organisations, the voluntary sector more broadly and the state. It appears that the state is refashioning these organisations in its own image to exploit the availability of unpaid labour, this increased reliance on VOs simply perpetuates the under-investment that mental health services have suffered for decades.

Moreover, this thesis takes issue with the political narrative of VOs being promulgated as ‘alternative providers’. Helpline was founded as a legitimate alternative to state provision and continued to operate in this alternative space for more than sixty years; enabled through its unique organisational characteristics and dedicated volunteer workforce. This thesis questions whether ‘alternative’ is truly the goal of government. If indeed it was, one would assume that organisations like Helpline could continue operating in the same way it had done without pressure to undergo widespread, transformative change. It appears instead, that the state wants services delivered by voluntary organisations in a way that is comparable to, and consistent with, those that are delivered by public and private sector organisations. It consequently seems as though the state is demanding that VOs reposition themselves not as ‘alternative’ providers but as ‘substitute providers’, hence, the emphasis on standardisation, consistency in terms of the end goal (reduced suicide rates) and a mimicking of a model that has not been designed for VS service provision. The state, ironically, will end up destroying

the thing it arguably, most needs to capture, that is, the presence of an alternative service. This is ultimately leading to a blurring distinction between the purpose of a statutory organisation and Helpline, as a unique voluntary organisation.

9.5 Contribution 4: Displaced volunteers

The final contribution of this thesis relates to the effect of ‘professionalisation’ on those organisational members who are responsible for delivering services and adapting to the above-mentioned organisational shifts and changes, that is, volunteers. Many have observed the paucity of quality empirical research which reports on situated volunteer experiences (see: Broadfoot et al 2008; Musick and Wilson 2008; Smith and Greenwood 2014; Mackenzie et al 2015; Wilks 2016; Smith et al 2018). More narrowly, the professionalisation debate has largely bypassed volunteers and very little is known about the complex reality of what professionalisation means for the sustained commitment of volunteers; an important issue for volunteering studies, not least because volunteer commitment and retention are tied to organisational survival (Brudney and Meijjs 2009; Vecina et al 2012; Alfes et al 2014). This thesis contributes an understanding of the implications of professionalisation on volunteers within Helpline, a notable difference is that this study, unlike in extant literature, is concerned with an organisation that is dominated numerically by volunteers (Einolf 2018).

The loss of organisational identity (outlined above in contribution 3), this thesis reveals, has important and potentially detrimental consequences when we consider the effect on the volunteer base of organisations like Helpline. Throughout this thesis, I have introduced the idea that some volunteering, largely dependent on the type of activities performed and the context within which it occurs, can have such significance and meaning for volunteers that an identity can be derived from it (contribution 2). In other words, the analysis revealed that the personal subjective experience of volunteering was deeply meaningful in the hearts and minds of volunteers. Helpline, for many volunteers, was a source of self-identity and a deep repository of meaning and emotional attachment. This was largely a result of the pertinent role of authenticity and lived experience that was central to the volunteer role (this itself, is an important outcome of the research).

The organisational changes that have been implemented across Helpline as part of its wider ‘professionalisation’ strategy, have changed the ‘meaning’ of volunteering for Helpline volunteers. The inherent conflicts detailed in chapter eight (including: the disruption to organisational values, the centralisation of power and control and the changing nature of the

delivery of empathy, emotion and authenticity) have led to widespread dissatisfaction and resistance among volunteers. The changes symbolise the diminishing control, autonomy and involvement of volunteers which is reconfiguring the highly valued, 'amateur' and 'grassroots' core that had previously characterised branches. Many volunteers perceived that management have effectively displaced them and redefined them as resources.

Put simply, the concept of 'loss' (contribution 3), does not end with organisational identity, rather, loss filters down and infiltrates the individual level of analysis, thus affecting the volunteer experience. As Helpline attempts to imitate the distanced relationships found in counsellor-client interactions, it changes the nature and meaning of 'authentic emotion work' for volunteers. In particular, changes are leading to increased scrutiny of volunteer performance as well as the imposition of limits on the nature of delivery which is resulting in a collective sense of disempowerment. Interactions have become increasingly mandated by 'professionalisation' and the (caller-volunteer) relationships have consequently become more transactional and less personal. In other words, the meaningfulness of interactions is reduced. This is problematic given that the commitment and identity of volunteers is driven by their ability to 'help' people through an 'authentic' expression of empathy. Volunteers felt disenfranchised about the way that 'help' now appears to constitute something different and thus, the sense of purpose and identity that volunteers derived from their membership is at risk of being lost. Organisational change was found to be disrupting the understandings that volunteers had of themselves as they were no longer able to perform their roles in a way that was consistent with their self-definitions due to organisationally circumscribed limits. In other words, volunteers who derived a sense of identity, meaning and purpose from their roles and the uniqueness of the organisation, suffer from weakened commitment. The volunteer workforce is dissatisfied, disenfranchised, displaced and disempowered and their positions are left in limbo as they oppose, resist and fight to retain the organisation's unique identity and the sense of meaning, purpose and personal identity that they derive from their membership.

This thesis contributes an understanding of what can happen to the 'meaning' of volunteering following change and professionalisation. More specifically, it explores how professionalisation threatens the sustained commitment of volunteers, thus highlighting, that it is erroneous to suppose that if a person has an initial altruistic motivation that facilitates their decision to volunteer, this will remain the same over time and will suffice to justify continuing commitment" (Rimaioli et al 2016:718).

9.6 Reflections of the research

Many qualitative researchers argue that researchers are active agents in the qualitative research process; that their values, interests, and perspectives actively shape the research and the knowledge it produces (Braun and Clarke 2013; McLeod 2001). For this reason, many have highlighted the importance of reflexivity in qualitative research. Reflexivity is a process through which the researcher acknowledges their involvement in the construction of the social world and furthermore, the impact that their own experiences and assumptions can have on the research. In an attempt to reflect on the present research, this section is guided by Johnson and Duberley's (2003) tripartite model of reflexivity in management research. This model involves, firstly, methodological reflexivity, i.e., evaluating the appropriateness of the research design and considering what might have been done differently; secondly, consideration of epistemic reflexivity, i.e., reflecting on my position as a researcher within the research process; finally, hyper-reflexivity, i.e., reflecting on how the research account has been constructed from within various traditions of social science.

9.6.1 Methodological reflexivity

Chapter four explained the series of methodological decisions that were made during this research in relation to the research questions. However, it is quite possible that the research process could have been done differently. One pertinent challenge of this study involved access; the data reflect only the views and experiences of those who were invited and chose to take part. Three cohorts were notably absent: paid personnel who were located at Central Charity; volunteers who had positive experiences of organisational change and volunteers who have ceased their Helpline membership.

As explained in chapter four, it was hoped that access would be secured at a national level rather than regional level. This would likely have provided a more nuanced picture, particularly in relation to external pressures and how, from an organisational perspective, these were being responded to internally. More specifically, conducting interviews with paid personnel would have offered, I suspect, a different interpretation of organisational change, and likely, a justification for why it was needed or necessary; something that volunteers (mostly) did not, or could not, communicate. Capturing the views of paid personnel was considered when formulating the research approach of this study; however, it was disregarded on both practical and methodological grounds. Practically, the internal politics of securing access at the national level (see chapter four) indicated that up-take and buy-in

would likely have been low. Methodologically, having scrutinised the volunteering literature (chapter three), I was acutely aware of the current lack of studies that prioritised (or even included) ‘volunteer voice’ and I was concerned that the inclusion of paid personnel may have detracted from this narrative that I was keen to capture.

Perhaps the most notable ‘absent voices’ were those volunteers who had positive experiences of organisational change. It could indeed have been the case that those who were negatively experiencing change were more inclined to participate in the research; perhaps viewing it as an opportunity to express their dissatisfaction. Those who had different experiences of organisational change may have felt that they had little to say on the matter and therefore were less inclined to volunteer their participation. Discussions with the Regional Director suggested that including a variety of different branches (within different geographic locations, comprising different structures and different volunteer-bases) might help to overcome the dominant ‘resistor’ voice. While it cannot be assumed that the experiences of those interviewed reflect a consensus, the sample of branches did provide an opportunity for other experiences to be heard. Finally, this study only includes the views of those who decided to continue to give their time to Helpline and who, therefore, were perhaps less resistant to change than some other organisational members. Much could have been revealed by Helpline ‘leavers’, whose experiences could have again provided further nuance to the picture presented in this thesis.

9.6.2 Epistemic reflexivity

Epistemic reflexivity examines the positioning of the researcher within the research process; this study was underpinned by an awareness of myself as neither an ‘insider’ nor an ‘outsider’ (see chapter four). My position as a ‘user’ of the Helpline service, could in some ways, have led interviewees to view me as ‘one of them’ (Dwyer and Buckle 2009). In one notable encounter, an interviewee, who was discussing her frustration at feeling that management were rejecting her own lived experience from interactions with callers, commented: “You’ll know where I’m coming from because you have an understanding of what we do, you know how deeply meaningful the volunteers’ own experience and background is when supporting callers”. Such encounters increased the personal concern that I might be inclined to uncritically ‘buy-into’ the volunteer narrative (see chapter four for strategies used to avoid this). In some ways, it is possible that a research approach that enabled greater distance would have made it easier to objectively identify and reflect upon

the volunteer experience. Equally though, I believe that this position afforded me many advantages that strengthened the research, such as: increased opportunity for empathy, heightened trust and a more ‘natural’ and open interaction; all of which potentially resulted in the generation of richer data and a greater degree of entry into the worlds of volunteers (Hayfield and Huxley 2015). Such insightful and interesting volunteer accounts may not have been elicited from a researcher who wholly considered themselves to be an ‘outsider’.

9.6.3 Hyper-reflexivity

Hyper-reflexivity refers to reflexivity regarding the construction of the research account within various research traditions. Given that this research is carried out within the social sciences, this study has sought to focus its attention on a specific population (volunteers) and the manner in which they behave and experience their worlds, specifically, in relation to organisational change. Those who seek to define volunteering tend to base their studies on theoretical analysis or quantitative research testing theoretically generated hypotheses and external definitions (Almond and Kendall 2000; Handy et al 2000; Meijs et al 2003).

Opposingly, this research adopts a position that rejects the positivist notion that reality is the same for each person and observation and measurement tell us what that reality is. This research is grounded in the tradition of social constructionism, a discipline which seeks to identify the subjective and nuanced accounts of people who play a central role in constructing their own realities. Although this thesis has been written with the intention of providing a comprehensive account of the research process, it is necessarily a product of myself as a researcher, and, as such, is wholly defined by my research interests, my experiences (of the research setting and life more generally) and is subsequently, written from my own perspective. In this respect, even though the intention of this thesis is to provide a convincing account of the research by citing evidence of others’ experiences (and supporting these findings in relation to existing literature), the story constructed is only one of many possible descriptions.

9.7 Opportunities for further research

There were some important and interesting themes that emerged from this research; themes that were not central to its initial focus and which consequently, inhibited them from being examined in greater depth than they were covered. In other words, development of these

themes was beyond the scope of this thesis but they certainly provide interesting directions for further research.

Firstly, throughout this research, I call for organisation studies to take a more proactive research approach towards voluntary organisations and voluntary work. With the increasing reliance on voluntary organisations to effectively deliver services, research must acknowledge, and embrace, the vast diversity of VOs that comprise the VS (something that is rarely done). This current research provided some interesting initial findings about the nature of certain types of voluntary work, for example, volunteer work was shown to be just as challenging and stressful as paid work. Greater exploration of the adverse experiences that volunteers encounter would not only help to overcome the conceptual ambiguity surrounding volunteering (see chapter three for full review) but would also pave the way for investigating volunteering, voluntary work and voluntary organisations as a field in isolation, as opposed to in association with broader social phenomenon such as work and leisure. Researching matters of the voluntary sector in this manner would provide valuable insights into: the specific kinds of activity being undertaken by volunteers; the experiences of volunteers and the types of activities that need support, recognition or regulation by the state.

Secondly, volunteering is an area currently lacking in extensive critical research; volunteering is frequently presented as a ‘cure-all’ remedy for maladies affecting society. This portrayal of the sector is further promulgated by policymakers through an uncritical dominant policy discourse that unquestionably posits the intrinsic value of volunteering and the societal benefits that it produces. While volunteering may well be a positive and productive activity that is good for volunteers, organisations, and society more generally, the complexity of these organisations, which rely heavily on funding and voluntary labour for their sustained existence, is often ignored altogether. This current research raises some important questions about 1) what happens to VOs when volunteers are dissatisfied and disenfranchised; 2) what happens to these organisations when the state take a particular interest in harnessing them and 3) what happens when certain (inherently positive) concepts such as commitment and identification are at risk of being lost or diminished. Such questions require the adoption of a critical perspective, which is currently extraordinarily lacking. Thus, there is great scope to further investigate and theorise these issues and thereby develop the volunteering field.

Thirdly, the unique conceptual framework that was developed in this research would benefit from investigation in other voluntary contexts to assess its applicability. A useful first step would be to investigate its adequacy in other voluntary settings that involve either crisis

volunteers or emotion work. For example, counselling services, emergency response services, psychiatric support, hospices, hospitals and disaster areas would all be valuable research sites since (one could assume) volunteers working in these environments would likely derive comparable cognitive and existential meanings from their efforts and work.

Finally, space constraints limited any great discussion on emotion work within Helpline. This was a particularly emergent theme and the dichotomy of emotion work as firstly, arduous and challenging and secondly, intrinsically connected with some of the best and most rewarding aspects of the role was a finding that I did not anticipate encountering. Conceptualisations of emotion work in this way appear to contrast with much of the debate in the employment relations literature where it is primarily seen as demanding an emotional display that is not genuine nor remunerated. Herein, there is scope for further interesting research to explore firstly, whether such conceptualisations are exclusively experienced in the voluntary context and secondly, what the prevalence and effect of emotional labour looks like within high commitment voluntary organisations.

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