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Control, Identity and Meaning in Voluntary Work: the Case of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution

By

Michelle O'Toole

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Warwick, Warwick Business School
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It is now four years since I first approached Professor Christopher Grey, describing myself as a very curious, fairly well educated and reasonably intelligent candidate for Ph.D. supervision. Within that time he has frequently proven himself as *un superviseor extraordinaire*, not just on account of his masterful knowledge and understanding of the organization studies field (and beyond) but also because of his wonderful ability to mentor, support and encourage with patience and good humour. Most ironically, Professor Grey ended up supervising this thesis on a voluntary basis which is a true testament to his generosity of character. This life-project of mine would not have happened without you Chris and I am very thankful for your unfailing support.

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I would also like to acknowledge and give thanks for the enduring love and support of my parents, family and friends, particularly Frank and Ruth. This thesis is dedicated, with love, to my parents Patrick J. and Eithne O'Toole for a lifetime of support.

DECLARATION

This thesis is submitted to the University of Warwick in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The work presented here is my own, except where specifically stated otherwise, and was performed at Warwick Business School, University of Warwick under the supervision of Professor Christopher Grey and Professor Nick Llewellyn during the period October 2009 – July 2013.

ABSTRACT

Organization studies, including studies of control and identity, has to date been almost exclusively concerned with organizations where work is paid for. By contrast, this thesis considers the dynamics of control and identity when work is unpaid, through the presentation of a qualitative case study of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution. This organization relies mainly on volunteers operating in a dangerous working environment to fulfil their mission of saving lives at sea. By considering unpaid voluntary work, the thesis deepens understandings of the relationship between control, autonomy and organizational meaning and identity. There are four main themes of analysis: thick volunteering, perilous volunteering, community and offshore operations. I propose thick volunteering as a form of volunteering from which a significant sense of identity may be derived. Perilous volunteering is theorized to denote volunteering activities whereby the volunteer chooses to engage in dangerous activity which may result in serious harm up to and including loss of life. Thick and perilous volunteering together are shown to have complex effects upon the dynamic of control within the organization. The theme of community shows how volunteering is embedded in a web of social relations, rather than simply being a matter of individual choice, and these relations significantly affect meaning and identity. The 'offshore' theme demonstrates how control, meaning and identity play out differently when the volunteers are on operational duty. Overall, the thesis contributes to the theory of volunteering as well as to more general debates about organizational control, identity and meaning.

INTRODUCTION

This research explores the dynamic of control and autonomy between volunteers and their management in the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI), a charitable organization whose mission is to save lives at sea. The thesis provides an interpretive analysis of organizational identity and meaning at the RNLI in order to advance understandings of how work is controlled when it is not paid for.

In a generic sense, issues of organizational control and autonomy are central to organization studies. From Max Weber's seminal work on bureaucracy, through Fredrick Taylor's scientific management and Henri Fayol's classical management theory, and up to the present day, control has featured prominently in managerial and organizational literature (Weber, 1946; Taylor, 1967; Fayol, 1949; for a comprehensive review see Gabriel, 1999). One shared current running through this literature is the dominant focus on *paid work* as the empirical site and theoretical assumption of most research. Part of what defines Weberian bureaucracy is that its functionaries are paid. If Weber can be regarded as the progenitor of organization theory, then paid labour is embedded in the central conceptualization of 'normal' organization. And, indeed, organization studies has subsequently been almost exclusively concerned with organizations where work is paid for. Mainstream economic understandings of work pivot on the assumption of a wage relation – work in exchange for money (Ashenfelter and Layard, 1986; Cahuc and Zylberberg, 2004; Ehrenberg and Smith, 2011). But this is no less true in Marxist analysis, where the wage relation is conceived of as being at the core of the labour process – the struggle over ownership of

surplus value in the capitalist mode of production only makes sense if people are paid (Braverman, 1974; Burawoy, 1979, 1985; Knights and Willmott, 1990). Whilst the broader literature of 'critical management studies' (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992; Collinson, 2000; Grey and Willmott, 2005; Alvesson et al., 2009) addresses control in less economistic ways, it too concentrates primarily on paid work. So, entrenched in conceptions of work, of the relationships between individual and organization, and accepted organizational strategies of managing and controlling workers, is the assumption of a wage relationship. What transpires when no such relationship exists?

By considering unpaid voluntary work, this thesis seeks to deepen understanding of the relationship between control, autonomy and organizational meaning and identity, the latter being two topics which have become focal points for management and organization studies research in, especially, 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). More specifically, this research seeks to provide rich, deep understandings of how control is manifested in an organization which largely depends on front-line volunteers operating in a dangerous working environment. It seeks to elucidate questions such as what mechanisms of control are mobilized by management and what are volunteers' responses? What consent and negotiation structures are enacted by volunteers and why? How does the dynamic of control and autonomy play out between the formal organization and the volunteers who operate locally? What are the sources of autonomy for volunteers? And, within this mode of organization where work centres on the

volunteer, who controls organizational meaning, identity and ownership, and how?

To develop answers to these questions, one place to look is the literature on volunteers and volunteering. 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. This literature generally falls into three categories; antecedents of volunteering (e.g. motivation to volunteer), experiences of volunteering (e.g. what is it like to be a volunteer, how do organizational matters influence volunteering) and consequences of volunteering (e.g. personal/organizational/societal consequences) (Wilson, 2012). The first of these research streams has received, by far, the most research attention to date. It is to the second stream, the 'experiences of volunteering' literature which my research most contributes, particularly as this strand is also that which focuses on the meso-level of volunteer administration. This specialist area of volunteer administration, surprisingly, has little to say about control, meaning and identity, and what it does offer is mainly superficial and overwhelmingly oriented toward prescriptive rather than conceptual concerns. Furthermore, the volunteer literature is predominantly (with some exceptions which I shall later outline) based on large-scale surveys with the intent of generalization and an overwhelming bias towards quantitative research methods. This is in marked contrast to my epistemological perspective of interpretivism and ontological preference of constructionism (which are detailed in chapter three). My research seeks, first and foremost, an *interesting*, fine-grained, meaningful account of

individuals' organizational experiences of volunteering, empirically drawn from individuals' accounts. I am specifically concerned with providing an interesting account, which to my mind is one replete with meaning, because it seems to me that organization studies in its current guise is too preoccupied with quantitative analysis, the very analysis which shifts emphasis onto the relationship between synthetically isolated variables, and away from the most interesting question of 'what does this all mean?'.

Therefore, this thesis tries to speak to that space where organization studies (specifically control, autonomy, meaning and identity) and volunteering literature overlap – a currently almost vacant space. More specifically, the thesis urges recognition of the variety of types of volunteering and in particular that these can be differentiated as to their 'depth' or 'thickness'. My concept of 'thick volunteering', as introduced in chapter one, makes an especially clear contrast with paid work, because by definition it is richer in meaning than what I call 'thin volunteering'. I propose thick volunteering as a form of volunteering which has sufficient significance and meaning as to make it possible for those undertaking it to gain a sense of identity from it. More specifically still, thick volunteering is made exceptionally thick when it consists of dangerous work. The issue of dangerous work has occasionally been considered by organization studies but again, normally when it is economically remunerated (e.g. Brewer, 1990; Gatino and Patriotta, 2013). So there is a further intersection – this thesis is at the meeting point of organization studies (control, autonomy, meaning and identity), volunteering (thick) and danger.

Whilst forms of control systems in volunteer organizations may be understood as a variant of control mechanisms in other organizations (e.g. bureaucratic, coercive, clan and cultural), it is my claim that they are differently inflected as a consequence of the volunteering relationship and a number of other significant historical, social and psychological factors. Autonomy, from the ancient Greek 'self' and 'law', is a fundamental concept of moral, social and political philosophy and has greatly informed disciplines inspired by these such sources, for example political theory, social science and the sociology of knowledge. In this thesis I argue that a fuller account of the inherent autonomy of volunteers and the antecedents of these forces for autonomy must be considered in light of the lack of an economic relationship between volunteer workers and their member organizations.

Indeed, the most salient and obvious formal characteristic of volunteers is the absence of payment for their work (Kreutzer and Jäger, 2011). By definition, volunteers have no economic or legal reasons for joining, or continuing to volunteer for, voluntary organizations. As Pearce (1982) indicates, this creates a distinctive type of pressure for organizations who depend on volunteer labour, due to their awareness that volunteers could abandon the organization at any given time. The absence of the key theoretical assumption and empirical condition of paid work means that when considering the context of volunteering, we have to think about control and autonomy in different ways. In this study I show how discourses of moral legitimacy, and moral stories which 'involve concerns about the social position of the self (and others) including issues of rights, duties, obligations, responsibility and potential blame' (Whittle and

Mueller, 2012: 114; cf. Harré and Van Langenhove, 1999; Van Langenhove and Harré, 1999) become, not merely mutually perceived and acknowledged, as in other cases where work is remunerated, but central and focal discourses, influencing action, behaviour and organizational ways of interpreting what is legitimate and correct. As I demonstrate, through the introduction of two innovative conceptual resources, namely, thick volunteering and perilous volunteering, *moral legitimacy* becomes the focus of meaning-making for both volunteers' and management's understanding of the organizing process within this voluntary organization.

The thesis is organized as follows: in chapter one I introduce volunteers as a distinct organizational group and, drawing wherever possible from volunteering literature, examine the sources of and significance of work and organizational meaning for volunteers. The significance of the volunteering activity and the importance actors cognitively and affectively attached to it were fundamentally meaning-making processes which influenced a breadth of personal and organizational consequences. I then selectively introduce a wider set of literatures including the meaning of work literature (Pratt and Ashforth, 2003; Rosso et al., 2010), psychological ownership literature (Dartington, 1998; Pierce et al., 2001, 2004) and literature which deals with meaning construction and values (Gray et al., 1985; Weick, 1995) in order to develop the distinction between 'thick' and 'thin' volunteering concepts. I propose thick volunteering as a form of volunteering which has sufficient significance and meaning as to make it possible for those undertaking it to gain a sense of identity from it. This leads to a feeling of ownership over the volunteer's role and/or the voluntary

organization. Thick volunteering is a principal focus and contribution of my thesis and will be discussed in great detail throughout.

My concept of perilous volunteering is also introduced in chapter one, where I advance the sociological term perilous volunteering to denote volunteering activities whereby the volunteer, by personal volition and having some prior regard to the risks that may be at stake, chooses to engage in dangerous voluntary activity which may result in serious and/or significant personal bodily or emotional harm or distress, up to and including loss of life. Surprisingly, both volunteering and organization studies literatures have previously had little to say on this important topic, and my research interest focuses on explicating what it *means* to work in a dangerous environment where a high risk of personal danger is involved, and especially in an unpaid capacity.

Salient organizational identity and identification literatures (e.g. Albert and Whetten, 1985; Glynn, 2000; Brown, 2006) are then introduced to justify my claim that for those engaged in thick volunteering, the exercise of the volunteering activity is a defining aspect of the self-concept. Broadly following the narrative collective identities perspective (Humphreys and Brown, 2002a, 2002b; Coupland and Brown, 2004; Brown, 2006; Kornberger and Brown, 2007; Thornbarrow and Brown, 2009) I examine the implications of exercising interpretive control over what the organization is and stands for, and the personal and organizational consequences of the identity construction of organizations. I argue that those engaged in thick volunteering experience the voluntary aspect of organizational identity as the *definitive* aspect of organizational identity and that interpretations which marginalise volunteers' claims to authority lead to

ideological conflict between volunteers and their paid managers. The chapter concludes with a summary of the key theoretical concepts mobilized and their applicability and use in conventional paid work, volunteering in general and thick volunteering specifically, thus also showing how a literature developed to analyse paid work helps or hinders the analysis of unpaid work.

In chapter two I outline the main modes of control typically identified within organization studies, namely; coercive (French and Raven, 1959; Etzioni, 1961), bureaucratic (Weber, 1946; Child, 2005; Adler, 2012), clan (Ouchi, 1979; Alvesson and Lindkvist, 1993; Kirsch et al., 2010), and cultural (Smircich, 1983; Meek, 1988; Parker, 2000) and consider their application to volunteering in general and thick volunteering specifically. For the purposes of this study, I follow Gabriel's meaning of control: 'a psychological process where individual actions, thoughts and feelings are knowingly or unknowingly restrained, moulded and guided by forces outside the individual' (Gabriel, 1999: 186). The classic dichotomy here is that between direct control (Edwards, 1979) which imposes known external constraint, and known or unknown ideological control (Heydebrand, 1989; Sewell, 1998; Willmott, 1993) which is discussed at length in this chapter. If we assume autonomy as a primary need of individuals (Deci, 1975; Hackman, 1980), relinquishing autonomy for coordination and cooperation becomes a necessary but problematic action as individuals must work within organizational constraints which limit their own action space. The research provides an account of how this dynamic plays out and how this process affects the control of organizational meaning.

Chapter two particularly highlights my claim that control in voluntary organizations is inflected in different ways due to a variety of historical, psychological and social factors, and, most crucially, the non-paid nature of voluntary work. Drawing wherever possible on empirical studies which concern volunteers and voluntary organizations, one current running through the chapter is to question how conventional literature developed for the analysis of paid work fares when work is actually unpaid. Broadly following a critical perspective, I challenge the assumptions of functionalist corporate culture literature which accounts for culture as a unitary and homogenous construct. I also consider the role of the individual values of those engaged in thick volunteering and the chapter concludes with an examination of how meaning and identity are controlled within voluntary organizations.

In chapter three I introduce the case organization and provide contextual detail as to the type, scale and breadth of their operations. The RNLI is a charity registered in the UK and Ireland with the mission of 'saving lives at sea' (RNLI Vision and Values Statement, 2012) and operates a twenty-four hour per day, 365-days a year lifeboat search and rescue service in 236 strategically-located stations dotted around the coast of the UK and Ireland. The organization depends on a network of over 31,500 volunteers, of which 4,600 are lifeboat operational crew members (RNLI About Us, 2013). A permanent paid staff of approximately 1,282 employees support and oversee operations (RNLI Annual Report and Accounts, 2012:28), the majority of whom are based at headquarters in Poole, Dorset, which is also the site of the Lifeboat Training College, a purposely built state-of-the art training facility for lifeboat crew. In this chapter I provide

important detail about the station organization structure, the roles of key personnel and the process of a rescue, and put forth evidence to support my claim that the RNLI is, in many ways, a highly unusual organization.

In the second section of chapter three I detail and account for the methodology used in this research. Guided by the interpretive epistemological paradigm in social studies, my research seeks to provide understandings of human behaviour and how individuals make sense of the world around them. The aim of an in-depth understanding of the *meaning* of the concept for those involved reflects the need for a research approach that respects the fundamental difference between natural and social science. This is particularly salient in the context of the interplay between RNLI management and unpaid volunteers over claims of ownership of the lifesaving service, of the boat and of organizational meaning. A case study design was chosen as the most appropriate in order to achieve the goals of the research. Access to the RNLI, the selection of research sites, data collection, and the management, analysis and write-up of the empirical data are described and justified.

In chapter four I present the empirical findings of the research under the themes of thick volunteering and its subsidiary theme perilous volunteering (the subsidiary theme partly explains the main theme). Thick volunteering helps to explicate and illuminate the ongoing dynamic between HQ and local stations regarding control and autonomy, which centred on such concerns as 'who is the rightful expert?' and 'who has the right to speak for whom and for what?'. I describe the meanings of thick volunteering which led to extraordinarily high levels of volunteer commitment and the prioritization of the volunteer role, and I

analyze the contested discourses of volunteerism. I then present evidence of station resistance to managerial discourses, and show how local stations strived to uphold their own frames which shaped values and basic assumptions. My findings on volunteer identity and organizational identity are then put forward. The ongoing and constant negotiation of social control and ownership of the lifeboat and the service it provided is illuminated by participant responses, and the theme explicates how different meanings attached to the boat and service held deep consequences for the nature of organizing (cf. Gergen et al., 2004). The analysis shows that within the station-HQ relationship, culture had as much potential to create conflict as it did to create harmony (cf. Grey, 2012).

My presentation of the theme of thick volunteering also empirically demonstrates the limits to volunteer tolerance of managerial controls and the resistance such controls engendered. Those engaged in thick volunteering developed a station-level consensus of local expertise and rightful autonomy, and commitment and identification remained with the 'family' of the station. This, I argue, was driven by emotional proximity to the cause (in which danger played a meaningful role) and the social reality that to be a volunteer as opposed to a paid hand bestowed something that money couldn't buy – higher moral ground.

Theme A2, perilous volunteering, is also presented in chapter four. Danger and risk were very much a way of life for the operational volunteers of the RNLI, both in the life-and-death situations encountered on rescue missions and via the process of placing themselves physically, psychologically and emotionally, in testing conditions. The fact that volunteers operated at the sharp

end of danger and peril gave a very credible weight to their mobilization of moral claims. This theme theorizes research participants' accounts of perilous volunteering in order to build theory and further understanding of the experience of working in dangerous conditions.

In chapter five I present the empirical findings under the themes of B1 community and B2 offshore, and show in a rich way how local stations and HQ attended to matters of meaning, culture and values. Using community as the specific construct within which to investigate meaning and identity, my research finds that, paradoxically, community served to both control and to bestow a source of autonomy on volunteers. Community was a meaningful source of autonomy to volunteers because of the historical, cultural and psychological discourses which asserted key narratives of rightful ownership and expert local knowledge. The theme of community also suggests that local members were perhaps expected to volunteer, and if they so 'chose', that they acted in ways which respected cultural understandings of what the boat and service stood for and meant, such as voluntary action, local helping, solidarity, and trust.

In Theme B2, offshore, I deal with such issues as the culture embedded within the organizational structure, the power of the coxswain and the autonomy of the boat once it was offshore. Crucially for this analysis, the control system of the organization, both formal and informal, changed depending on whether the boat was at sea or on land, because once at sea command rested with the coxswain. Ironically, at the very point of production of the service, RNLI management were physically absent, although the effects of their extensive training regime were embedded into how volunteers made sense of their work,

the service and themselves. Offshore, I argue, is where the deep significance of what the RNLI stood for and meant came to life in the most salient ways for the operational crews of the RNLI.

Chapter six provides my analysis of the overall meaning and story told by the various themes. In this chapter, I make explicit my theoretical positioning and framework, and relate the findings to implications for organizational control and implications for meaning and organizational identity. The extraordinarily high levels of commitment and involvement of volunteers acted as a formidable force for the development of a sense of ownership towards the lifeboat, the service it provided and, by extension, the organization. The sense of ownership and autonomy over their local lifeboat suggested that volunteers were, in some ways, unmanageable. Furthermore, in parallel, volunteers were locally socialized by station leaders to consider and think of the lifeboat as belonging to them and the local community. Whilst volunteering for the RNLI was very much embedded within a communal setting and meaning, it was also a deeply personal, individual and value-based activity. One consequence of the emotional and psychological ownership was the discourse of moral legitimacy which volunteers mobilized to assert their version of control over management and the organization.

In chapter six I also provide deep empirical insight into how people and groups performed and negotiated their interactions to produce the realities they lived by. Claims to legitimate station autonomy, at their most basic level, rested on a morally justified conviction. Since volunteers did all the dirty work of lifeboating, and were not paid for the dangerous work they accomplished, they

felt a moral entitlement to autonomy by virtue of their ongoing sacrifice. Most interestingly, this moral conviction worked to shift perceptions of legitimate authority away from where it usually lies in 'normal' organizations – i.e. with managers – to the collective body of volunteers, and embodied particularly by the coxswain whilst the boat was offshore. The chapter then proceeds to set out further implications of thick volunteering for organizational control, meaning and identity.

Finally, in the concluding chapter I set out the key findings and contributions of the research, explaining what has been achieved and why this matters. The chapter looks at the nature of the relationship between control, resistance and wage labour and discusses how control operated when workers were unpaid. The nature of work in the absence of the wage labour relationship is then discussed through the lens of Arendt's (1958) conception of work as an activity distinct from labour. The chapter argues that volunteering, in this context, meant more than the individual voluntary action and calls for more nuanced and sophisticated research which takes into account the dualism of structure and agency (cf. Giddens, 1984). The relationship between danger and meaning is also examined, along with the limitations of the research and opportunities for further research. The thesis ends with some concluding thoughts about how research of voluntary organizations can contribute to organization studies.

'Man's [sic] main concern is not to gain pleasure or to avoid pain but rather to see a *meaning* in his life' (Frankl, 1959: 115, emphasis added)

CHAPTER 1: ORGANIZATIONAL MEANING AND IDENTITY IN VOLUNTARY SETTINGS

1.1 Introduction: Organizational meaning and identity in voluntary settings

In this chapter I introduce volunteers as a distinct organizational group and, drawing wherever possible from volunteering literature, examine the sources of, and significance of, work and organizational meaning for volunteers. Meaning is crucial in understanding the dynamics of control and autonomy, the literature on which will be presented in the next chapter. The significance of the volunteering activity and the import actors cognitively and affectively attach to it are fundamentally meaning-making processes which influence a breadth of personal and organizational consequences. Meaning and identity stand in a dialectical relationship: To speak of having an organizational identity or even a contested organizational identity is bereft without first understanding the *significance* of organizational identity to actors. The meaning of volunteerism for members aids a nuanced understanding of volunteer experiences, particularly with regard to responses to mechanisms of control mobilized by management, and volunteer perspectives on volunteer autonomy. Indisputably, 'questions about where and how employees find meaning in their work are fundamental to how employees approach, enact and experience their work and workplaces' (Rosso et al., 2010: 92; cf. Brief and Nord, 1990a; Super and Šverko, 1995; Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001). Given the terminology on 'employees' and 'workplaces', this

chapter will also question how a literature developed to analyse paid work helps or hinders the analysis of unpaid work.

Specifically, this chapter synthesizes and examines extant literature in order to theorize two central, interrelated research questions, each concerned with understanding how people negotiate and construct the realities they live by; (1) what it means to volunteers to be a volunteer undertaking dangerous work and what the sources of this meaning are; and (2) what the organization means or stands for in terms of organizational identity, how this can be multifaceted and contested, and how this informs cultural control in voluntary organizations.

Such questions traverse a relatively wide, but remarkably inter-related set of literatures, whose connections are hitherto unexplored in a volunteering context: specialist volunteering literature (Britton, 1991; Cnaan and Amrofell, 1994; Clary and Snyder, 1999; Musick and Wilson, 2008; Haski-Leventhal and Bargal, 2008; Hustinx et al. 2010; Jakimow, 2010; Kreutzer and Jäger, 2011), the meaning of work literature (MOW International Research Team, 1987; Brief and Nord, 1990b; Pratt and Ashforth, 2003; Grant et al., 2008; Rosso et al., 2010), literature on organizational identity and identification (Albert and Whetten, 1985; Dutton et al., 1994; Golden-Biddle and Rao, 1997; Glynn, 2000; Pratt, 2000; Whetten, 2006; Brown, 2006), psychological ownership literature (Dartington, 1998; Pierce et al. 2001, 2004), and literature which deals with meaning construction and values (Schultz, 1967; Berger and Luckman, 1966; Gray et al., 1985; Weick, 1995). Wherever possible, I will draw from volunteer accounts in the literature, although, as I will show, there is a dearth of quality empirical research which reports on situated volunteer experiences, a deficiency

which the current research seeks to rectify. As a prelude to all this, I would like to briefly elucidate what I imply by meaning and also touch upon the role of language in creating meaning and significance for actors.

1.2 Making meaning, meaningfulness and language

The concept of 'meaning', although intuitively simple to grasp, is difficult to define (Brief and Nord, 1990a; Super and Šverko, 1995; Rosso et al., 2010). The central tenet of the phenomenological perspective of how individuals make sense of the world around them is the idea that 'all knowledge and meaning is rooted in the subjective view of the knower' (Gray et al., 1985: 85; cf. Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Mead, 1964; Weber, 1964; Schultz, 1967) and that through a process of subjective interpretation, an individual assigns meanings to his or her own actions and the actions of others (Gray et al., 1985). Own and others meanings are influenced by the environment or social context (Weick, 1995; Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). Meaning, then, is a socially constructed phenomenon (Berger and Luckman, 1966). As human behaviour is a product of how people interpret the world, actions are taken on the basis of meanings imputed to self and others actions (Schultz, 1967; Blumer, 1969; Hammersley, 1989). As Gioia and Chittipeddi assert, 'understanding and action…depend on the meaning assigned to any set of events' (1991: 435; cf. Daft and Weick, 1984).

At an individual level of analysis, meaning is taken to be 'the output of having made sense of something, or what it signifies' (Rosso et al., 2010; cf. Pratt and Ashforth, 2003). Meaningfulness, a related but distinct concept, refers to the amount of significance something has for an individual (Pratt and

Ashforth, 2003), and is usually denoted with a positive valance in the literature, that is, the more meaningful something is to an actor, the more positive significance they attach to it. This is to say that a particular experience can be sensed and experienced as extremely meaningful by one individual, and not especially meaningful or significant by another (Rosso et al., 2010). At both individual and organizational levels, argues Karl Weick, people constantly engage in sensemaking (1988, 1993, 1995; Weick et al., 2005), which is the process by which individuals and groups give meaning to experience(s). Although the finer details of Weick's sensemaking approach are beyond the scope of this thesis, its basic premise holds that 'reality is an ongoing accomplishment that emerges from efforts to create order and make retrospective sense of what occurs' (Weick, 1993: 635). Organizational sensemaking is a form of joint meaning construction and reconstruction by involved parties. Recognising the political nature of organizational life, 'sensegiving' is a term coined by Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) to denote 'the process of attempting to influence the sensemaking and meaning construction of others towards a preferred redefinition of reality' (p. 442).

It is widely recognised in social science generally and organization studies specifically that the power of language in creating and enacting meaning cannot be understated (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Steier, 1991; Rosenau, 1992; Deetz, 1992a; Silverman, 1993; Watson, 1994b; Hardy et al., 1998; Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000a, 2000b; Westwood and Linstead, 2001; in identity studies specifically see Fiol (2002) and Kornberger and Brown, 2007). Language, according to Fairclough (1989:3) is 'perhaps the primary medium of social

control and power' (also Chreim, 2006) due to its possibilities to produce knowledge and to frame and create reality (Astley, 1985). Gergen (1982: 101) argues that 'our knowledge structures are linguistic conventions', and Taylor and Van Every (2000: 58), following a constructionist approach, believe our situations are 'talked into existence'. Language, the creation of meaning and individual and organizational sensemaking are intertwined – as Kornberger and Brown emphasize: 'language affects what we see and structures our thoughts, facilitating and constraining understanding in organizations' (2007: 513, cf. Gergen and Thatchenkery, 1996). Through these processes 'organizational members' discursive practices come to form the calibration [or 'truth'] points for defining local reality' (Chia and King, 2001: 312).

1.3 Volunteers, 'thick volunteering' and 'perilous volunteering'

The pursuit of defining volunteers and volunteerism 'is an elusive task that has baffled scholars for years' (Hustinx et al., 2010: 412; cf. Smith, 1982; Van Til, 1988; Cnaan et al., 1996; Carson, 1999; Wilson, 2000). In a content analysis review of over 200 definitions of volunteering, Cnaan and Amrofell (1994) and Cnaan et al. (1996) find that all definitions centre on four axes: (1) free will (although this can vary from individual will to persuasion from relatives, social norms etc.), (2) availability and nature of remuneration (completely unpaid to expenses paid), (3) proximity to beneficiaries (for example whether unpaid caring for relatives should be classed as voluntary work) and (4) formal agency (whether or not the volunteer is working on behalf of a recognised organization). Perhaps unsurprisingly, Handy and colleagues, who reviewed volunteering

across the disciplines of economics, sociology, psychology and political science, found that the economic cost of volunteering is generally upheld as the foundational unit of the concept of volunteering. In their sample of 3,000 individuals spread over five countries, the results showed that 'the individual incurring higher net cost is likely to be perceived as 'more' of a volunteer than someone with a lower net cost' (2000:47). Even within the voluntary realm, it appears that economic understandings are the most privileged.

The problem of categorizing volunteering sociologically has been intermittently raised in the literature (Cnaan et al., 1996; Handy et al., 2000; Musick and Wilson, 2008; Hustinx et al., 2010). One relevant attempt to overcome this issue is advanced by Britton (1991), whose research focus is Stoddard's 'permanent disaster volunteer', an individual who:

Arrives on the scene at the time of disaster, has some disaster training

and carries a designated title which facilitates role-playing expectations

prior to and during the disaster. (Stoddard, 1969: 188)

This trained civilian volunteer is 'the backbone of society's organized response to mass emergencies and disasters' (Britton, 1991: 395). Thus their role is similar to, but not the same as that of the volunteers of the case organization – a disaster is the exception rather than the rule, whereas routine accidents and incidents happen every day. In any case, having reviewed the literature, Britton deduces some conceptual prospects based on the type of involvement within a

social action framework and the degree of commitment to the voluntary activity,

which I now present in tables 1.1 and 1.2.

		Type of involvement (continuum)		
I1	**Unconventional participation**	Conventional participation	What is normal and legitimate for a citizen to do
I2	**Formal voluntary group action**	Informal voluntary group action	Explicitly organized (institutionalized) or informally organized actions
I3	**Accommodative orientation**	Conflict orientation	Action that aims at integration or action that aims at change
I4	**Primary involvement**	Secondary involvement	The group is the perpetrator of action, or the group will facilitate action later
I5	**Service-orientated function**	Change-orientated function	E.g. Caring or pressure groups
I6	**Normative commitment**	**Affective commitment**	Action motivated by expectations or action motivated by intrinsic factors
I7	**Stress generating work environment**	Relaxed work environment	
I8	**Risk assumed by volunteer**	Volunteer work is relatively risk-free	
I9	**Hybrid organization**	Bureaucratic or looser arrangement	

Table 1.1: Typology of volunteer involvement adapted from Britton (1991: 400) with profile of the typical volunteer of the case organization highlighted in **bold**

		Degree of commitment (continuum)		
C1	**Active participation**	Inactive participation	Planned help or spontaneous help, direct or indirect intervention
C2	**Parochial participation**	**Communal participation**	Whether the activity is something the individual is personally concerned about or whether the basis of action is much broader
C3	**Sustained volunteer work**	Non-specific volunteer work	Whether the individual contributes time in order to achieve something which they find personally rewarding or whether the basis of action is purely altruistic
C4	**High commitment**	Low commitment	The extent to which the aims and purposes of the organization are fully internalized
C5	**Permanent volunteer**	Ephemeral volunteer	Those that carry a designated title and facilitate role-playing expectations or those who arrive on the scene and desire to help
C6	**Willingness to assume potential costs (time, energy, hurt)**	Unwilling to assume potential costs	

Table 1.2: Typology of volunteer commitment adapted from Britton (1991: 400) with profile of the typical volunteer of the case organization highlighted in **bold**

Britton's framework is valuable as it provides a series of starting categories from which to profile the typical volunteer of the case organization (highlighted in **bold**), whose involvement and commitment can be theorized at both ends of the continuum in some aspects. Three additional points, culminating in a fourth are discussed by Britton, but surprisingly, not inserted into his typology (I have inserted them in my adaptation). They are (I7) the generative/underlying stress associated with the task domain, (I8) the degree of risk associated with voluntary action, and (I9) working under a hybrid[1] organization of bureaucratic and looser arrangements. These concepts culminate in (C6): The costs, in terms of time, effort, energy and possible physical or psychological hurt whilst pursing tasks. This latter point is particularly relevant to the current study and will be discussed in great detail in subsequent chapters.

Taken as a typology, Britton's is not without its limitations. In attempting to overlap macro and micro-focuses, much is lost. It does not define what volunteering is or is not, nor does it consider volunteering as a social construct. Type of involvement and degree of commitment are left unlinked and so sociological or qualitative possibilities such as developing terminology or categorizations are left unexploited. As the scheme is not cross referenced, noncongruent positions are left unanalyzed. Guesswork is required to infer, for example, that emerging high commitment over time may lead to transition from ephemeral volunteer to permanent volunteer.

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[1] By this, Britton means that whilst voluntary workers typically volunteer under the norms set out by a looser organizational form than bureaucracy, 'continued active membership is conditional on adherence to bureaucratic rules…administered by nonvolunteers' (1991: 403), for example stringent training requirements.

However, Britton's typology is useful as it partially helps to explain two concepts which I develop in the current study, namely 'thick volunteering[2]' and 'perilous volunteering'. Outside of specialist voluntary and non-profit journals, voluntary settings are, surprisingly[3], very unusual in organizational research. A comprehensive search of the Association of Business Schools (ABS) four star rated organization studies and general management journals from the period 1983 – 2013 yields just forty-nine papers referring to voluntary organizations[4]. The majority of these journal articles are not even theoretically focused on the activity of volunteering or the volunteer experience *per se* and only a handful are set in a perilous work environment comparable to what the volunteers of the case organization face. In a recent review of the literature, John Wilson (2012) bemoans the fact that research on *the experience of volunteering* remains neglected; I am of the same mind and find that recent research overwhelmingly privileges the motives and characteristics of volunteers (Studer and Von Schnurbein, 2012; cf. Bussell and Forbes, 2002; Rochester, 2006; Rochester et al., 2009b; Hustinx et al., 2010), frequently over-determining agency whilst under-determining the interplay of structure (cf. Giddens, 1984). One significant theoretical difference between my work and that of others is that the types of volunteering work situations and experiences other authors report could arguably be classified as 'thin volunteering' compared to the 'thick volunteering' which, as I will show in chapter four and elsewhere, was observed empirically.

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[2] I am grateful to my supervisor Professor Christopher Grey for suggesting this phrase.

[3] Surprisingly, given that in the UK 41% of adults volunteer formally, that is 'giving unpaid help through a group, club or organization' (Institute for Volunteering Research, 2013) and in Ireland 38% of adults volunteer (World Giving Index, 2011: 39), although it is not known what percentage of Irish volunteer formally.

[4] These are listed in appendix A.

1.3.1 'Thin' volunteering

The vast majority of research on volunteering and voluntary organizations deals with or reports on organizational and personal circumstances which would firmly be based in the non-highlighted columns of Britton's typology above (with the exceptions of 'formal voluntary group action' and 'accommodative orientation' but that is substantively irrelevant to my point anyhow). I find, in these accounts, existentially impoverished narratives of 'thin' volunteering, where volunteering may be an expected gesture, for example volunteering a couple of hours a week in an offspring's nursery school (e.g. Valcour, 2002); may be a way of somehow abstractly 'contributing to the community' as in the case of Mangan's study of credit union volunteers (2009: 114); or a way of filling time in retirement as in Smith's (2004) study of the perceptions of midlife workers. As reported in Eliasoph (2011), the personal experience of partaking in 'plug-in' (in the cited example, a short-term project designed to deliver social services and provide civic education for youth volunteers) volunteering programmes may also be 'thin' as she finds that that by no means do such projects enhance commitment, civic involvement or indeed personal development. A canonical example of 'thin' volunteering is reported by Taylor et al. (2008), who found that volunteers at an animal shelter insisted on flexibility in their rotas and refused to make long-term commitments. These instances of 'thin' volunteering, where the volunteer is not particularly attached to the voluntary task and/or to the voluntary organization must be understood as qualitatively different from the experiences and perspective of those engaged in thicker forms of volunteering. The sense of psychological ownership (Pierce et

al., 2001) over the task and/or the organization is, emphatically, not as salient or meaningful for the 'thin volunteering' group, and it is questionable whether volunteers derive a sense of identity from the activity. This means that, theoretically at least, volunteers who engage in 'thick' volunteering will behave in different ways to those whose participation is 'thin'.

1.3.2 'Thick' volunteering

It is my thesis that the depth of commitment and involvement, ownership, cognitive and affective feeling attached to the *meaning of volunteering* for volunteers engaged in the activity of thick volunteering has to do with a much deeper meaning of volunteerism than that which is reported in the scant literature (in either the management and organization studies or the specialist volunteering literature fields) which is empirically sited in voluntary organizations and deals with *experiences* of volunteering[5]. I propose thick volunteering as a form of volunteering which has sufficient significance and meaning as to make it possible for those undertaking it to gain a sense of identity from it, leading to a feeling of ownership over the volunteering role and/or the voluntary organization. Commitment and involvement signify the existence of thick volunteering and are products of its cognitive and affective meaningfulness. Thick volunteering is a principal focus of my thesis and will be discussed in great detail throughout. Specifically, the relationship between issues of control, autonomy and thick volunteering will be examined in the next chapter.

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[5] One exception to this is an excellent ethnographic study reported by Haski-Leventhal and Bargal (2008) who describe the emotional involvement and levels of commitment and identification of volunteers as they go through the transitions (lifecycle) model of volunteering.

Given the centrality of these distinctions to the current research, the following table provides definitions and examples of extant literature:

Thin volunteering	Thick volunteering
Definition: A form of volunteering activity which does not have sufficient significance and meaning as to make it possible for those undertaking it to gain a sense of identity from it.	Definition: A form of volunteering activity which has sufficient significance and meaning as to make it possible for those undertaking it to gain a sense of identity from it, leading volunteers to experience feelings of ownership over the volunteering role and/or voluntary organization
Examples: Valcour (2002) Smith (2004) Taylor et al. (2008) Mangan (2009) Eliasoph (2011)	Examples: Lois (1999) Haski-Leventhal and Bargal (2008) Kreutzer and Jäger (2011)

Table 1.3: Definitions of thin volunteering and thick volunteering and empirical examples

1.3.3 'Perilous volunteering'

My concept of 'perilous volunteering' has not yet found its way into volunteering scholarship. Here, I propose to use the term to denote volunteering activities whereby the volunteer, by personal volition and having some prior regard to the risks that may be at stake, chooses to engage in dangerous voluntary activity which may result in serious and/or significant personal bodily or emotional harm or distress, up to and including loss of life. Again, both volunteering and organization studies literatures have been surprisingly silent on this, the matter of dangerous work, and current ways of understanding it are primarily framed by economic (Dorman, 1996; Dorman and Hagstrom, 1998) and risk management perspectives. Whilst risk has 'become an important topic in society and a key concept in social and cultural research' (Gephart et al.,

2009: 141; cf. Beck, 1992; Perrow, 1999, Lupton, 1999a, 1999b; Miller, 2009) the concrete realities of what can actually happen when theoretical risks become realised have been abstracted to such an extent that the literature does not report on, what I believe to be the most interesting topic of *what it means* to individuals to work in a dangerous environment and particularly in an unpaid capacity. As the perilous work issue is so salient for this thesis this is a point I discuss at length in subsequent chapters and especially in chapter four. My substantive point here is to propose 'perilous volunteering' as a sociological term, as defined above, indicating the high risk of personal danger involved in undertaking such volunteering activities.

A striking example of perilous volunteering is given in Haski-Levanthal and Bargal's (2008) revealing ethnographic study of Israeli volunteers working in an outreach programme for street-children in Jerusalem. Here a young female volunteer describes a traumatic encounter she has with an organizational client. In this passage it is painfully clear that the costs of perilous volunteering can be high:

> There's a boy with whom I have a good relationship, a very violent boy. And I keep telling him that I love him endlessly, that I care for him and that he's important to me, and I want what's best for him. And he started aggressively testing this. Like, 'what am I going to do to make you stop loving me?' For he doesn't know anyone who truly loves him, not even his own mother. So it came to a point where he put a knife to my neck. (2008: 82)

The above quote is, of course, a potent example, but it does not explicate what it *means* to be a volunteer working in a perilous environment and what the sources of this meaning are. My research seeks to better understand the relationship between danger and meaning in thick volunteering contexts.

Moving from an individual to an organizational level of analysis, what does the collective organization mean to volunteers in terms of what it stands for, and why do contestations arise regarding the identity of the organization? The next sections of this chapter will set out the existing literature's responses to these issues and the following chapter will examine thick, perilous volunteering vis-à-vis organizational control.

1.4 The meaning of work literature

The meaning of work literature spans the disciplines of sociology, economics, organization studies and psychology and is primarily concerned with where and how employees find meaning and meaningfulness in their work (Rosso et al., 2010). Although primarily developed to analyse paid work, this literature is extremely useful in assisting a broader understanding of what unpaid work means for individuals, particularly in instances of thick volunteering. As my research will later show, volunteering can be very embedded within a communal setting and meaning, but as well as this, volunteering is a personal activity which serves different functions and fulfils different needs and goals for different individuals (Omoto and Snyder, 1995; Clary et al., 1998; Hustinx and Lammertyn, 2003). Therefore, there are probably as many constellations of meaning attached to volunteerism as there are volunteers. The point here is to

show the existence of a significant vein of extant research investigating sources of meaning which has produced many theorizations which, to greater and lesser extents, show how a literature developed to analyze paid work can hold great promise for the analysis of unpaid work[6]. After presenting the table I then proceed to analyse some particularly relevant empirical research which investigates meaning in volunteering contexts:

Sources of Meaning	Main focus of extant research	Generic examples	Volunteering examples
Self and self concept	How personal values, motivations and beliefs affect experienced meaningfulness of work	Hackman and Oldham (1976, 1980) Fried and Ferris (1987) Brief and Nord (1990b) Nord et al. (1990) Shamir (1991) Brown (1996) Deci and Ryan (2000) Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) Scott Morton and Podolny (2002) Bono and Judge (2003) Seo et al. (2004) Gandal et al. (2005) King et al. (2006) Douglas and Carless (2009) Peterson et al. (2009)	Pearce (1993) Clary et al. (1998) Reich (2000) Farmer and Fedor (2001) Hustinx and Lammertyn (2003) Yeung (2004) Bekkers (2005) Haski-Leventhal and Bargal (2008) Haski-Leventhal and Cnaan (2009) Omoto et al. (2010) Wilhelm and Bekkers (2010) Grönlund (2011) Ward and McKilliop (2011) Kreutzer and Jäger (2011)
Others	'Individuals interactions and relationships with other persons or groups, both within and outside the workplace, influence the meaning of their work' (Rosso et al., 2010: 100)	Katz and Kahn (1978) Tajfel and Turner (1979) Near et al. (1980) Kahn (1990) Weick (1995) Wrzesniewski et al. (2003) Pratt and Ashforth (2003) Bono and Judge (2003) Piccolo and Colquitt	Rochester (1999) Nelson et al.(1995) Simon et al. (1998, 2000) Lois (1999) Connors (1999) Zimmeck (2001) Hood (2002) Netting et al. (2004) McAdams (2006b) Matsuba et al. (2007) Kulik (2007b)

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[6] Interestingly, presented here in date order, we also see the lag as the volunteering literature initially struggled to keep up with generic literature.

		(2006) Pratt et al. (2006) Kahn (2007) Grant (2007, 2008) Grant et al. (2008)	Barnes and Sharpe (2009) Brudney and Meijs (2009) Duke et al. (2009) Studer and Von Schnurbein (2012)
The work context	How the design of job tasks, job crafting, organizational mission and personal financial circumstances affect meaning and meaningfulness	Hackman and Lawlor (1971) Hackman and Oldham (1976) Jahoda (1982) Fried and Ferris (1987) Brief and Nord (1990a) Brief et al. (1995, 1997) Pratt (2000) Bunderson (2003) Cha and Edmondson (2006) Lyons (2008) Leana et al. (2009) Bunderson and Thompson (2009) Berg et al. (2010a, 2010b)	Galindo-Kuhn and Gaskin (2003) Leonard et al. (2004) Taylor et al. (2008) Machin and Paine (2008) Boezeman and Ellemers (2008) Rochester et al. (2009a) Tang et al. (2009) Kreutzer and Jäger (2010) Jakimow (2010) Wilson (2012)

Table 1.4: Sources of meaning derived from meaning of work literature and volunteering literature

Research that connects volunteering with volunteer's personal identities has become more prevalent during the last decade (Grönlund, 2011; cf. Clary et al., 1998; Reich, 2000; Hustinx and Lammertyn, 2003; Yeung, 2004) and it is believed that volunteering may contribute greatly to the self concept (Farmer and Fedor, 2001). It is widely understood that 'people seek roles in which they can express core aspects of self' (Reich, 2000: 425; cf. Katz and Kahn, 1978; Schlenker, 1985; Swann, 1987; Backman, 1988). Assuming this, volunteering provides individuals with a point of reference for defining their identities (Wuthnow, 1991; Haski-Leventhal and Cnaan, 2009). Values, motivations and

beliefs have been the subject of a growing volunteer literature, mostly taken together under the umbrella topic of motivation to volunteer.

A notable exception to what is otherwise perhaps a quite bland literature is Haski-Leventhal and Bargal's (2008) aforementioned study which convincingly claims that people volunteer in order to express their deeply held personal values. The authors' treatment of organizational socialization, uniquely amongst this genre of research, gives central significance to emotional developments within the socialization process, showing in a plausible manner how a 'meaningful event' (p.83) for volunteers captures their emotions and forces their affective involvement. Respondents spoke of being 'haunted' by the distress of the youth they worked with, and reported 'an almost traumatic effect, including nightmares [and] depression…' (2008: 87), indicating their deep involvement and connection to their role and organizational clientele. Resultantly, that research finds that affective involvement binds the volunteer to the organization and their role, influencing meaningfulness and personal commitment in powerful ways. I argue that affective involvement is strongly present in thick, perilous volunteering situations, an assertion which will be empirically demonstrated in subsequent chapters.

I would also suggest that volunteering in order to live one's values may be even more salient in the case of perilous volunteering, as it makes little sense for people to routinely place their life in jeopardy for a cause which they do not feel strongly connected to. Katz and Kahn (1978) touched upon a variant of this argument in their thesis on the social psychology of organizations:

Motivation associated with value expression and self-identification…is

particularly prevalent in voluntary organizations as volunteers are not

likely to engage in efforts for the organization if they do not share at

least some of the core values of the organization. (p. 361)

This finding is empirically confirmed in Pearse (1993). Peril is an aspect of

volunteering which may make it particularly 'thick', and I will later show that

the two are deeply connected. I propose that values and deeply held beliefs (the

antecedents of which are explored in detail later) facilitate the connection of

volunteerism to the self and imbue the activity with meaning. Values and beliefs

may also account for the high level of commitment and psychological ownership

inherent in thick volunteering.

Sociologically, volunteering is sometimes presented as an individual's

way of expressing, and providing a role model for core societal principles such

as solidarity, social cohesion and democracy (Wuthnow, 1998; Putnam, 2000). A

genre of research on moral identity (Hart et al., 1999; Younis and Yates, 1999;

Aquino and Reed, 2002; Grönlund, 2011) investigates the inherent need of the

person to act morally towards their fellow citizens. Chapter five in particular

takes this idea forward and relates it to the case organization.

Due to the limited volunteering literature on meaning and

meaningfulness, support for 'others' as a source of meaning in volunteering

contexts is uncovered through conjecture and inference. The quality of the social

interaction between volunteers and their co-workers and leaders (paid and

unpaid) is an area of growing research interest which is primarily focused on the

meso-level of volunteer administration/management (Connors, 1999; Hood, 2002; Stallings, 2007). The 'conflictual nature of the relationship between volunteers and paid staff' (Studer and Von Schnurbein, 2012: 12) appears to inform most analyses, with a variety of organizational pathologies (high turnover, confusion and ambiguity, lack of communication etc.) theorized as consequential of poor social relations stemming from lack of understanding and attendance to the differences between volunteers and paid staff (Perlmutter, 1982; Netting et al., 2004). In order to aid volunteer and managerial sensemaking, differentiated views on volunteer coordination strategies which recognise the essential differences between volunteer staff and their (often) paid superiors have been called for (Rochester, 1999a; Zimmeck, 2001; Barnes and Sharpe, 2009; Brudney and Meijs, 2009). In the main however, the literature does not particularly engage with how these interactions create and shape meaning for volunteers, a research gap which the current project seeks to ameliorate.

As volunteers tend towards organizations who they believe share their values, it is thought that the positive effects of socialization, such as enhancing commitment, are amplified by the implicitly shared common values (Lois, 1999; Haski-Leventhal and Cnaan, 2009). Thus, where volunteers experience the organization as not, after all, congruent with their salient values, the meanings provided by leaders and management are likely to be even more important cues for volunteers' sensemaking. When volunteers feel deeply connected to the cause of the organization, research shows that contestations arise as to how the organization should conduct its affairs (Kreutzer and Jäger, 2011; Grönlund,

2011). This might suggest that volunteers will embrace organizational control if it is congruent with their values and resist it if the organization seems not to live up to their expectations.

Some research finds that group membership impacts on all volunteering (Haski-Leventhal and Cnaan, 2009). Group identity and norms can provide meaning and tighten social control. Governing through teamwork is not, of course, a new concept (Sinclair, 1992; Barker, 1993; Dunphy and Bryant, 1996; Sewell, 1998). In their typology of volunteer groups, Haski-Leventhal and Cnaan (2009) show how bonding and socialization enhance meaning and commitment to the group and the voluntary task. Commitment thus is both a form of meaning, and a signifier that personal meaning is present. Meaningful commitment to the group is demonstrated in Hustinx et al.'s (2010) case example of volunteers for Ronald McDonald houses[7], and is cited as a central reason why volunteers remain volunteering. In a fascinating ethnography which echoes the perilous work context of the present research, Lois (1999) analyses the socialization of members of a volunteer-based mountain rescue association. She finds that the relations among members depended to a great extent on whether individuals were considered, by key members of the association, to be core or peripheral members of the team. Meanings were derived from the extent to which an individual was prepared to withstand the prevailing attitude towards commitment – new joiners were basically ignored until core members sensed that they would conform to the strong group norms. In this way, those who were less serious or who wanted to join for the wrong reasons (e.g. self-glorification) would be

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[7] Ronald McDonald Houses are typically co-located with children's hospitals and provide "a home away from home" to seriously ill children and their families (RMHC, 2013).

weeded out, and those who really cared about the task role of the group and displayed persistence would stick with it. Meaning was created by the group norms of commitment, dedication and denying the self for the good of the group. Lois also points out the complexity of the symbolic rewards transacted in normative organizations: 'symbolic rewards…can be increased in value and then used to induce desired behaviour' (1999: 133). This form of compliance is, consequentially, that which is manipulated in normative organizations (Etzioni, 1961; Lewis, 2007), as shall be set out in chapter two.

How volunteers relate to clients is also a potentially fruitful source of meaning which is overlooked to a great extent in the literature. Identification with and being embedded within groups and communities are potential sources of meaning to volunteers and have important effects on the volunteering experience (Hustinx et al., 2010), and for thick volunteering, particularly so, as I will later show empirically. In their study of a group-level perspective of helping, Simon et al. (2000) draw on the responses of 100 registered members of the German AIDS volunteer association. They find that 'helping is most likely to occur among people who are tied together by 'the bonds of we'' (Hornstein, 1976: 62), inferring that the meaning derived from identification is an important determinant of helping behaviour. By examining the special complexity of RNLI volunteers' webs of relationships, my research extends this line of thought.

The volunteering literature touches upon family as a potential source of meaning for volunteer workers. Child psychologists such as Eisenberg et al. (2006) and those whose primary interest is social work (e.g. Kelly, 2006; Caputo, 2009, 2010) believe that:

Families play an important role in the transmission of civic mindedness: horizontally through interactions with other adults in the community…and vertically as parents socialize their children. (Caputo, 2010: 36)

Parents, when they volunteer, may act as role models for their children and volunteering can take on meaningfulness for the child as s/he connects the action of a positive role model to the preferred identity of the self. As I will show, this phenomenon is especially represented within the local stations of the RNLI. In a similar vein, Duke et al. (2009) find that parents create the emotional environment wherein volunteering is encouraged, providing constructive meanings towards voluntary work, and emphasizing voluntary work as a positive space.

Research on organizational mission asserts that meaningfulness derives from perceived congruence between organizational mission and personal core values and ideologies (Pratt, 2000; Thompson and Bunderson, 2003). I have already argued that this is particularly salient in the case of voluntary organizations. In a rare instance of excellent qualitative volunteerism research, Jakimow (2010), to whom I will return, shows that not only are values an essential part of non-government organizations (NGOs) identities, but that contestations over the meanings of values, in her research the value of 'volunteerism', are productive mechanisms whereby narratives and counter-narratives shape the very meaning of 'volunteerism' for actors.

Meaning of work scholars have also attempted to understand how financial circumstances impact the significance of work for individuals. It is generally agreed that if an individual is experiencing financial distress, the economic value of work is more salient than its latent rewards (Jahoda, 1982; O'Brien, 1986; Brief and Nord, 1990a; Brief et al., 1995, 1997). Common sense dictates that the more critical the economic value of time, the less of it people will give away for free (Wilson, 2012).

Sources of meaning derived from the work context are particularly salient for this study, especially meanings which arise apropos the management of unpaid workers, and will be introduced in conjunction with theoretical insights from the management and organization studies literature in the next chapter. Taken together, so far, the meaning of work and volunteering literatures imply meanings which are deep-rooted and have far-reaching consequences, and applying them to a new empirical domain, that of thick, perilous volunteering should broaden the scope and range of both literatures. Before moving on to discuss the organizational identity literature I would like to briefly make some statements regarding the volunteering literature which I encountered thus far.

Many of the studies are based on large-scale surveys with the intent of generalization and an overwhelming bias towards quantitative research methods such as regression analysis. Apart from some noted exceptions, the methodology predominantly follows a positivist perspective – a marked contrast to my ontological preference. Within volunteering literature, motivation to volunteer is researched *ad nauseam*. What is especially problematic about this is that although general social science wisdom professes that peoples' behaviour is

greatly influenced by their social context, most motivation to volunteer researchers rarely get past the notion that individual characteristics explain volunteering (Wilson, 2012). The pattern replicated on a grander scale throughout the *corpus* of literature is that of research divided into discrete silos, which at best can only provide simplistic views. Although many individuals volunteer for roles which assume various levels of dangerous working environments (e.g. firefighting, search and rescue, caregiving etc.) no research in this genre mainlined on the special complexity of how danger affects meaning. As I reviewed the literature I often wondered where the interesting, fine-grained, deep and meaningful accounts, empirically drawn from individuals' experiences, were hidden. There exist many, many opportunities for deep qualitative research that genuinely seeks to understand the in-depth meaning *(Verstehen)* of the concept of volunteering for those involved, particularly to advance understanding of organizational clashes over meaning. The current project is a contribution towards that goal.

I now move from analysing the literature on meaning to the concept of organizational identity in order to further my research questions; how are work, organizational meaning and identity controlled when work is unpaid?

1.5 Organizational identity and identification literature[8]

I have already argued that thick volunteering exists where the volunteering activity and/or voluntary organization becomes so important to volunteers via

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[8] The level of analysis and foci of the various research drawn on here is both individual and organizational. For excellent discussions on cross-level theorizing in relation to individual and organizational identity see Jenkins (1996), Morgeson and Hofman (1999) and Hatch and Schultz (2002).

processes of attachment, ownership and affective commitment that the target (voluntary role and/or voluntary organization) becomes a defining part of the identity of the volunteer. In other words, for those engaged in thick volunteering, membership of the organization is a defining aspect of the self-concept, a point I will return to when I discuss identification. In this section I will examine the organizational identity and identification literature, drawing, wherever possible, from empirical research which focuses on volunteers and the experience of volunteering. I will map the dominant perspectives on organizational identity, showing how identity impacts meaning, significance and control, and investigate how contested organizational identity is a power effect of identity claims mobilized by groups within the organization.

The literature on organizational identity is far from homogenous or monolithic (Gioia et al, 2000; Pratt, 2003; Brown, 2006). Whilst most studies of organizational identity proceed from Albert and Whetten's (1985) seminal text defining organizational identity as 'members' shared beliefs about what is central, distinctive and enduring about the organization' (p. 263), theoretically and practically, organizational identity has become as contested as the related construct of organizational culture[9]. Epistemologically, ontologically and

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[9] On the conceptual boundaries between organizational identity and organizational culture, Whetten (2006) delineates the two meanings of culture used in organizational scholarship. If organizations are perceived as cultures (e.g. Fiol et al., 1998; Hatch and Schultz, 2000) then organizational identity is 'the self-referencing aspect of organizational culture' (p. 227), e.g. Barney and Stewart, 2000. If the reading of culture is one of the comparable properties of organizations (e.g. 'IBMs culture'), then cultural elements function as part of the organizations identity, or in other words, culture is thought to inform organizational identity. In either reading, cultural control is analogous to identity control, with much cultural control utilizing the control of individual and organizational identity (e.g. Administrative Science Quarterly special issue on critical perspectives on organization control, 1998; see also table 2.3 in chapter two). An individual's sense of membership in the organization, and by extension what the organization stands for, shapes their sense of self (Van Maanen, 1975; Feldman, 1976; Van Maanen and Schein, 1979; Tajfel and Turner, 1985; Breakwell, 1986; Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Kramer,

consequently methodologically, shared meanings are extremely problematic (Scott and Lane, 2000). This complexity is further complicated upon consideration that 'nonprofit organizations [who rely on volunteers] are often characterised by conflicting multiple organizational identities' (Kreutzer and Jäger, 2011: 635, cf. Golden-Biddle and Rao, 1997; Glynn, 2000). Unsurprisingly, conflict between different groups, typically the conceptually meaningful groups (Gephart, 1993) of paid staff/management on one hand and volunteers on the other, erupts as a result of different perceptions and enactments of the organizational identity (Kreutzer and Jäger, 2011).

What is at stake in identity contestations is the organization's collective sense of 'who we are', and all the adjunctive power effects which arise from legitimating one meaning over competing meanings. Identity is a powerful conceptual tool, and in practice influences the most fundamental issues pertaining to organizations, not least 'how strategic issues and problems, including the definition of firm capabilities and resources are defined and resolved' (Glynn, 2000: 286, cf. Dutton and Dukerich, 1991; Dutton et al., 1994; Dutton, 1997). Theoretically, it is the potential for metaphoric complexity within the concept organizational identity which holds most promise for its use as an analytic tool.

Almost three decades on from Albert and Whetten's (1985) introduction of organizational identity, there remains great debate as to whether organizations can be known by 'central, distinctive and enduring' characteristics (p. 263) (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000; Hatch and Schultz, 2000; Albert et al., 2000;

1991; Shamir, 1991; Shamir et al., 1993), and thus identities can be conceived of as power effects (Kunda, 1992; Grey, 1994; du Gay, 1996; Alvesson and Willmott, 2002).

Haslam et al, 2003; Pratt, 2003; Currie and Brown, 2003; Whetten, 2006; Kornberger and Brown, 2007). In an update to the original paper, Whetten (2006) attempts to strengthen the definitional power of organizational identity by opening out the meanings implied by the original tripartite definition. The 'distinctive' characteristic is posited to have dual meaning. Firstly, it is a reference to what makes an organization different to others sharing the same institutional space. Secondly, drawing on meaning stemming from the need for positive self-regard (Abrams and Hogg, 1988), distinctive has a reading of 'distinguishing', as convincingly argued by Czarniawska (1997) and empirically shown by Rao et al. (2000), whose study emphasizes the identity-distinctive and distinguishing referents driving publicly traded corporations to switch their stock listings from the NASDAQ to the more prestigious NYSE. Thinking about characteristics as distinctive lends an organization the cue of categorical imperatives which signify 'the boundaries of appropriate action for a particular organization' (Whetten, 2006: 223). In other words, identity-referent discourses aid decision-making because they elucidate what it means for the actor to act-in-character (Douglas, 1987), vital for legitimacy, accountability and integrity requirements (Suchman, 1995; Czarniawska, 1997; Goodstein and Potter, 1999; Polos et al., 2002). Researchers consistently empirically find that inter-group tensions arise when organizations act out-of-character (Douglas, 1987; Wilkins, 1989; Paine, 1994; Kogut and Zander, 1996; Czarniawska, 1997; Goodstein and Potter, 1999; Polos et al., 2002; Porac et al., 2002).

An empirical example of this is found in Jakimow (2010) who deftly investigates the meaning of the value 'volunteerism' for different actors

connected to Indian NGOs. At a macro-level, conforming to dominant discourses of what it should be to be a voluntary organization (i.e. poor and honest) is rewarded with the bestowal of legitimacy, essential for funding and survival (Djelic and Quack, 2003; Lister, 2003). Varying conceptualizations of volunteering have a productive, generative power. These narratives 'not only reflect people's understandings, but also shape them' (Gupta, 2005: 190). NGO corruption is a controversial topic in India (Das, 2003) and Jakimow skilfully shows how actors shift the boundaries of the definition of corruption through mobilizing counter-narratives and discourses (and although Jakimow does not specifically relate it, engaging in Goffmanesqe 'face work'), in order to 'alter the definition of social legitimacy' (Dowling and Pfeffer, 1975: 127) amongst peers and the general public. Different interpretations are promulgated by NGO heads in order to present an identity which is positively meaningful for donors, the general public and volunteers alike, in the hope of securing an identity which complies with acting-in-character (Douglas, 1987) and mitigates the effects of any external identity-threatening counterclaims (e.g. Dutton and Dukerich, 1991; Elsbach and Sutton, 1992; Elsbach, 1994).

Returning to Albert and Whetten's seminal definition, what comes to be thought of as central and enduring is a product of institutionalized referents of significant past organizing choices[10] (Whetten, 2006, cf. Powell and DiMaggio, 1991). Action patterns which are repeated over time become institutionalized and are given a normative justification (Czarniawska, 2009). What is central about an organization is what 'members consider to be essential knowledge

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[10] I will explain this with regard to the case organization in chapter three.

about their organization' (Whetten, 2006: 224), especially with regards to the deepest commitments which an organization stands by through time and across circumstances. Identities can hold not just inter-organizationally, but also, as Porac et al. (1989) show, in the cognitive communities of erstwhile competitive institutional groups. In their study, it is especially clear how 'identity claims [are] depicted as morals embedded in well-told stories of the defining moments in an organization's history' (Whetten, 2006: 224, cf. Kimberly, 1987). Identity-claims which claim to honour the organization's reputable heritage are particularly difficult to refute.

Recognising that organizations can, and often do, exhibit simultaneous multiple competing identities has lead to a growing body of literature on narrative collective identities, championed appealingly by Andrew Brown and colleagues (Humphreys and Brown, 2002a, 2002b; Currie and Brown, 2003; Coupland and Brown, 2004; Brown, 2006; Kornberger and Brown, 2007). The strength of this approach is its multifaceted complexity – the narrative perspective does not presume *a priori* or indeed 'insist that collective identities must be shared, or are always fragmented, or must be discontinuous or are mostly enduring' (Brown, 2006: 734). Rather, as I explained at the start of this chapter, the narratives that people tell about organizations, and those that get taken up as 'truth', are performative speech-acts that 'bring into existence a social reality that did not exist before their utterance' (Ford and Ford, 1995: 544). This approach is firmly rooted in the social constructionist perspective (Berger and Luckman, 1966; Rabinow and Sullivan, 1979; Knorr-Cetina, 1981) which professes that organizational identity is 'constructed, enacted, and

interpreted during everyday, face-to-face interactions among members' (Golden-Biddle and Rao, 1997: 594, cf. Schultz, 1976; Geertz, 1983). The reality organization members construct or enact is therefore a narrative reality (Mink, 1978) and under the narrative approach, the identities of organizations are 'constituted by the totality of collective identity-relevant narratives authored by participants' (Brown, 2006: 735). Multiple narratives exist because stories are told from different points of reference, and different groups will tell quite different stories (Hazen, 1993; Boje, 1995; Rhodes, 2001; e.g. Humphreys and Brown, 2002a, 2002b). Some of the themes and storylines will become shared, or partly shared, through social processes of dialogue, networking, negotiation and socialization.

In an excellent study of the Atlanta symphony orchestra, Glynn (2000) shows how organizational identity is indeed a resource to be claimed. She notes how organizations can have hybridized identities when two seemingly contradictory elements are co-located, as with the case of the conflicting identity logics of the utilitarian administrators and artistic performers of the symphony orchestra. Through the identity lens of the vested interests of their discrete professions, groups of social actors craft *their* particular identity frame and lay claims to the identity of the organization. Intergroup conflict emerges because 'claims and counter-claims over the organization's identity are made in an effort to legitimate certain groups over others' (*Ibid*, p. 287). What is at stake in legitimating certain voices over others is the (re)conceptualization of what the organization *means* for members and whether they identify with it. Member identity regulation through processes of organizational identity construction and

reconstruction is a significant and important modality of organizational control (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002, cf. Knights and Willmott, 1989; Deetz, 1992b; Kunda, 1992; Barker, 1993; Casey, 1995) which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. The implications of exercising interpretive control over what the organization 'is' and 'stands for' implies a level of control over what employees 'are' or 'should be' and defines the legitimate and justifiable space for what they can and should do. Identity construction of the organization strongly shapes identity regulation of the employee in terms of what is valued, correct and *legitimate* behaviour.

In other words, the power to control organizational identity is a form of control over the subjective realities of its people (Knights and Willmott, 1985, 1989; Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Deetz, 1992b; Pratt, 2000). I would argue that this is a particularly delicate issue in the ideological milieu of the normative voluntary organization, not just because individuals join these organizations to live their values (Farmer and Fedor, 2001; Haski-Leventhal and Bargal, 2008), but especially in the light of the lack of economic remuneration, and even more markedly in the context of the dangerous work of perilous volunteers. The social process of organizational identification can help explain this dynamic. Identification is the 'degree to which a member defines him/herself by the same attributes that he or she believes define the organization' (Dutton et al., 1994: 239). In other words, what an individual thinks about her organization affects the way she thinks about herself, and vice-versa. Support for this concept is widespread within the paid work literature (Cialdini et al., 1976; Gecas, 1982; Stryker and Serpe, 1982; Tetlock and Manstead, 1985; Schwartz, 1987; Markus

and Wurf, 1987; Vardi et al., 1989; Dutton and Dukerich, 1991; Kunda, 1992; Pratt, 1998, 2000, 2008) which also consistently finds that, with varying degrees of success, top leaders seek to inculculate preferred identities by managing how employees make sense of themselves (Pratt, 2000).

A review of research on organizational identification reveals 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. I posit that identification may work in different ways in normative voluntary organizations than in economic relationships. Identification profoundly draws on peoples' tendencies to classify themselves and others into various social categories (Pratt, 2000; Kärreman and Alvesson, 2004). A social identity confirms an affiliation with a social group and 'charges it with emotional significance and personal meaning' (Kärreman and Alvesson, 2004:154). In the case of thick volunteering, where volunteers are deeply committed to the point of psychological ownership, and consider volunteering to be a salient aspect of their self-concept, it stands to reason that the voluntary aspect of the organizational identity will be perceived as *the definitive* aspect of the organizational identity. Moreover, identification is also a process of self-definition (Brown, 1969; Kramer, 1991) – who one is, is not, and why this matters. In this emotionally charged, meaningful context, threats against 'volunteerism' will be profoundly opposed, more vociferously, I would argue, than in an economic employment relationship. In practical terms, this means that those engaged in thick volunteering will strongly resist any competing discourse to volunteerism. This will be thoroughly empirically examined in chapter four.

Many accounts in the volunteering literature pivot on the assumptions of a natural tension between volunteers and paid employees (Paulwitz, 1988; Rosenbladt, 2000; Hwang and Powell, 2009) and on the static definition of identity as the shared meanings regarding what is central, distinctive and enduring as per the original Albert and Whetten definition (1985). Studies of better quality allow for the recognition that 'non-profit organizations are often characterized by conflicting multiple organizational identities' (Kreutzer and Jäger, 2011: 635; Golden-Biddle and Rao, 1997; Jakimow, 2010). What is at stake in organizational identity debates is often at the very heart of what the organization *means* to social actors in terms of how it determines them as core or peripheral. In Glynn's study, the rhetoric evoked by administrators was 'couched in the language of business' (Glynn, 2000: 292, cf. Fine, 1996) with management positioning themselves as the *rightful experts* to exercise selfless guardianship. Identity, put simply, is a mark of importance. Albert and Whetten describe this as 'a struggle …over the very soul of the institution' (1985: 272).

In a specific example, drawing from narrative interview data in six voluntary patient organizations, Kreutzer and Jäger (2011) present the areas of conflict that arise from differing and contradictory perceptions of organizational identity. Volunteers, they find, perceive volunteering not just as a meaningful part of their own individual identity, but also as a major part of the organizations identity, and on account of this, 'emphasize *their* authority to lead the organization' (p. 653, emphasis added). For volunteers, the organization is, first and foremost, a volunteer organization. Contradictory identity dimensions coexist and are claimed by different groups within the organization, leading to a

'duality of identity' (p. 655). The conflict which arises is deeply rooted in different perceptions about the organizational identity, with the introduction of managerialism and bureaucratic procedures adulterating meaning and commitment for volunteers. The findings of this interesting comparator study are summarized in the table below and these issues will be explored in greater detail vis-à-vis the case organization in chapter six.

Conflict areas	Volunteer identity	Managerial identity
Authority: Each identity claims to lead the organization	"We are a volunteer organization" "Volunteers run this organization" "We are the ones affected"	"There is no work like professional work"
Expectations: Volunteer logic implies unrealistic expectations of paid staff output	"We are a poor organization"	"Money, money, money"
Motivation: Trade-off between managerialism and volunteer motivation	"Our association relies on flexibility and personal networks"	"Our organization relies on standardized procedures"

Table 1.5: Conflicting identity dimensions (Kreutzer and Jäger, 2011: 652)

1.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I introduced volunteers as a distinct organizational group and examined the sources of and significance of organizational meaning for volunteers. By synthesizing specialist volunteering literature, the meaning of work literature (Pratt and Ashforth, 2003; Rosso et al., 2010), psychological ownership literature (Dartington, 1998; Pierce et al., 2001, 2004) and literature which deals with meaning construction and values (Gray et al., 1985; Weick, 1995), I developed the distinction between 'thick' and 'thin' volunteering concepts and proposed thick volunteering as a form of volunteering which has

sufficient significance and meaning as to make it possible for those undertaking it to gain a sense of identity from it. This, I argued, leads to a feeling of ownership over the volunteering role and/or the voluntary organization.

My novel concept of perilous volunteering was also introduced to denote volunteering activities whereby the volunteer, by personal volition and having some prior regard to the risks that may be at stake, chooses to engage in dangerous voluntary activity. Surprisingly, both volunteering and organizational studies literatures have previously had little to say on this important topic, and my research interest focuses on explicating what it *means* to individuals to work in a dangerous environment where a high risk of personal danger is involved, and especially in an unpaid capacity.

I then set out salient organizational identity and identification literatures (Albert and Whetten, 1985; Glynn, 2000; Brown, 2006) to justify my claim that for those engaged in thick volunteering, the exercise of the volunteering activity is a defining aspect of the self-concept. Broadly following the narrative collective identities perspective of Brown and colleagues (Humphreys and Brown, 2002a, 2002b; Currie and Brown, 2003; Coupland and Brown, 2004; Brown, 2006; Kornberger and Brown, 2007), I examined the implications of exercising interpretive control over what the organization 'is' and 'stands for' and the personal and organizational consequences of the identity construction of organizations. I argued that those engaged in thick volunteering will experience the voluntary aspect of organizational identity as the *definitive* aspect of organizational identity and that interpretations which marginalise volunteers'

claims to authority will lead to ideological conflict between volunteers and their paid management.

The concluding table provides a summary of the key theoretical concepts mobilized and their applicability and use in conventional, paid work, volunteering in general and thick volunteering specifically, thus also demonstrating how a literature developed to analyse paid work helps or hinders the analysis of unpaid work. The next chapter moves on to examine particular types of control manifested in voluntary organizations and investigates what these organizational controls mean for volunteering generally and thick volunteering specifically.

Concept	Use in conventional, paid work	Applicability to volunteering in general	Applicability to thick volunteering
The meaning of work	Investigates where and how employees find meaning in their work, and relates this to 'how employees approach, enact and experience their work and workplaces' (Rosso et al., 2010:92). Finds that the self and self concept, others, and the work context are significant sources of meaning.	Provides theoretical and empirical insights on such issues as motivation to volunteer and motivation to continue volunteering. If 'people seek roles in which they can express core aspects of the self' (Reich, 2000: 425) then the volunteering identity is considered an expression of personal identity.	Assists in analysing the co-production of volunteering and identity – if 'people seek roles that express key aspects of the self' (Reich, 2000: 425), thick volunteering helps to understand what this means for the co-development of organizational identities and individual identities. The concept of thick volunteering suggests that affective involvement and volunteering in order to live one's values explains why volunteers are so highly committed to their roles.
Psychological ownership	Even in the absence of legal claims to ownership, employees experience a sense of psychological ownership over their role and work output (Pierce et al., 2001, 2004).	Potential to explain a range of volunteer behaviours within volunteer organizations, but currently overlooked as a research topic.	Helps to explain why volunteers develop possessive feelings for, and believe the self to be, psychologically (and emotionally) tied to, the target (organization/role/ output).
Organizational identity and identification	An organization can be known by central and enduring attributes that distinguish it from other organizations (Albert and Whetten 1985; Whetten, 2006). Narrative collective identity perspective argues that 'organizations' identities are discursive constructs constituted by the multiple identity-relevant narratives that their participants author about them' (Brown, 2006: 731). The collective organizational	Provides potential to classify voluntary organizations as such, based on the clients they serve, the context they operate in and the identity-relevant narratives members' believe define the organization. An individual's sense of membership in the organization, and by extension what the organization stands for shapes their sense of self (Tajfel and Turner, 1985; Shamir et al., 1993), and so identities can be conceived of as power effects (Kunda, 1992; Grey, 1994).	The study of those engaged in thick volunteering calls for a more in-depth understanding of the co-production of organizational and individual identities, given the different power balance between individual and organization compared to conventional work relationships. The concept of thick volunteering argues that membership of the voluntary organization is a defining aspect of the self-concept, and so, in practice, challenges to the 'volunteerism' aspect of the organizational identity will be profoundly

	identity is defined as the totality of such narratives. Organizational identification is 'the degree to which a member defines him- or herself by the same attributes that he or she believes define the organization' (Dutton et al., 1994: 239).	This is particularly applicable to understanding more generic issues of control and identity in volunteering contexts, but is currently overlooked as a research topic.	opposed. Identification helps explain the high levels of commitment between team members because it draws on human tendencies to classify themselves and others into various social categories (Pratt, 2000; Kärreman and Alvesson, 2004).
Dangerous work environment	Rarely or very superficially researched. No research mainlines on the special complexity of how danger affects meaning.	Particularly relevant to some specific volunteer roles and contexts, but rarely researched, and not as a focal issue.	Contributes greatly to the deep meaning of volunteer work. Awareness through previous experience of high stakes involved forces affective commitment (Haski-Leventhal and Bargal, 2008). Thickness is related to the potential to save life whilst potentially losing one's own life.

Table 1.6: Concepts and their use in conventional paid work, volunteering in general and thick volunteering specifically

Dump this page

'I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul'
(William Ernest Henley 1849-1903)

CHAPTER 2: ORGANIZATIONAL CONTROL AND AUTONOMY IN VOLUNTARY SETTINGS

2.1 Introduction: Organizational control and autonomy in voluntary settings

One of the central issues this research seeks to understand is how work is controlled when it is not economically remunerated. Notwithstanding the formidable intellectual tradition behind our current understandings of control and autonomy at organizational level, the evident limitation of existing research is its overwhelming bias (theoretically and empirically) towards paid employment. Mainstream organizational literature, as I will show, does not deal adequately with voluntary organizations, and specialist volunteering literature is preoccupied with categorizing the governance of non-profit organizations into agency or stewardship paradigms (e.g. Olson, 2000; Miller, 2002; Brown, 2002; Cornforth, 2003; Caers et al., 2006; DuBois et al., 2009; Ostrower and Stone, 2010; Kreutzer and Jacobs, 2011), assuming *a priori* that the ideology behind each model trickles down in some sort of measured and predictable way via paid administrators. This state of affairs is to the detriment of providing de-familiarized (Bauman, 1990), rich, fine-grained narrative accounts of the experiences of volunteers and their management. My research seeks to provide such an account by addressing the following research questions: How is control manifested in volunteer organizations? What are the sources of autonomy for volunteers? What responses are enacted by volunteers? And, following from the

previous chapter, how is organizational identity and meaning controlled in voluntary organizations?

To that end, in this chapter I will focus on typical modes of control mobilized within voluntary organizations, namely; coercive control (Etzioni, 1961, 1975; French and Raven, 1959); bureaucratic control (Merton, 1940; Weber, 1946; Gouldner, 1954; Blau and Scott, 1962; Price and Mueller, 1986; Barker, 1993; Grey, 2005; Child, 2005; Clegg et al., 2008); clan control (Ouchi, 1977, 1979; Alvesson and Lindkvist, 1993; Kirsch et al., 2010); and normative control (Schein, 1985; Meek, 1988; Heydebrand, 1989; Kunda, 1992; Barker, 1993; Willmott, 1993; Knights and Willmott, 1995; Sewell, 1998; Grey, 2005), whilst also suggesting that the influence and consequential behavioural effects of these controls will be offset by a conscious and wilful striving for autonomy by volunteers. Such an analysis both investigates the relationship between control and meaning and challenges existing conceptions by highlighting a kind of inherent autonomous power of those engaged in thick volunteering, a power which works in multiple ways to counterbalance the mobilization of managerial controls. Whilst doing so, this analysis also highlights the paucity of interdisciplinary research which deals with the experiences of volunteers at an organizational level.

2.2 Coercive control

Coercive control, stemming from French and Raven's (1959) influential categorization of coercive interpersonal power is typically taken in the literature[1] to mean control centred on the threat of punishment – that A can exert influence on B based on B's belief that A can dispense undesirable penalties or sanctions (French and Raven, 1959; Etzioni, 1961; Schlenker and Tedeschi, 1972; Near and Miceli, 1995). In this section, I offer suggestions on ways to theorize coercive control in order to make sense of the dynamic in volunteer organizations. In doing so, I open up a rare inquiry into the dynamics of control for this under-studied group.

Etzioni's classic analysis (1961) catalogues work organizations according to three main forms of organizational control operating at any given time, namely; coercive, remunerative and normative, and cross-references these with the type of member involvement in the organization, respectively; alienative, calculative and moral. Congruency between type of power and type of involvement facilitates three main forms of organizational control; the use of coercive power over alienated members, the mobilization of economic power over calculative members and the enactment of normative power over members who develop a moral connection (Kunda, 2006; cf. Etzioni, 1961). The moral-calculative distinction drawn by Etzioni has been supported by much empirical research in paid work relationships (e.g. Kidron, 1978; Gould, 1979). In this

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[1] Although as a matter of nomenclature, a stream of literature which actually analyses bureaucracy has taken to using the term 'coercive' to refer to the impact of bureaucratic formalization on members experiences. An example of this is the much-cited piece by Paul Adler and Brian Borys (1996) 'Two types of bureaucracy: Enabling and coercive'. Other examples include Walgenbach (2001) and Adler (2012). In this vein, Clawson in particular notes how asymmetries of power turn bureaucratic formalization into a coercive mechanism (1980).

context however, the challenge of using a literature developed to analyse paid work is immediately apparent as it is highly questionable that volunteers who become alienated in Etzioni's sense would continue volunteering. As I will show, this is *not* to say that the corresponding coercive power is immobilized within the organization. It is a truism that economic power holds no role in explaining the control dynamic in the case organization because those engaged in thick volunteering clearly do not join the RNLI for economic reward. In effect one line of questioning throughout this thesis is: what happens when the second type of control (economic power) and the second type of member involvement (calculative members) are absent?

Unpacking Etzioni's typology, Perrow (1986), amongst others, has criticized the scheme as tautological, lacking analysis of noncongruent positions and not exploiting the dynamic potential of each situation. For example, Etzioni neatly cross-references a certain type of moral involvement with a certain type of control in a typography that is perhaps too neat to truly capture the messiness of organizational life. It is unclear what happens where there are overlaps between the concepts or where more than one is at play at any given time. More problematically, the credibility of the predictive possibility of power mobilizing in certain ways to gain specific, linear results must be questioned. Nonetheless, Etzioni's framework does provide a certain explanatory usefulness applicable to this study, particularly in a meaning which helps refute the claim that coercive power does not operate in volunteer organizations (Farmer and Fedor, 2001; Pearse, 1993).

In their research on volunteers' contributions to charitable organizations, Farmer and Fedor explicitly theorize the absence of coercive control:

…obtaining worker compliance with organizationally specified rules, roles and performance standards relies heavily on providing material rewards (e.g., remuneration) or the withdrawal of these rewards (e.g., termination). These rewards or punishments, which are the underpinning of this form of control system, are simply not available for the management of most unpaid workers[2] . (2001: 193)

In a similar vein, Cnaan and Cascio argue that 'volunteers are difficult to monitor because they are not liable to serious sanctions' (1998: 1). Contrary to this, it is my claim that despite the absence of a wage relationship, elements of coercive control will be evidenced, experienced, and influential within voluntary organizations. This representation of coercive control is constituted in discourse and interaction, constructed by management and volunteers. The dynamics of the ideological reproduction of coercive control within the social processes which

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[2] There are a number of issues to deal with here. Firstly, coercive control in any and all organization is bound up in a broader argument which Etzioni (1961) amongst others with typically wider concerns (mostly following Marxist interpretations e.g. Benson, 1977; Braverman, 1974, Burawoy, 1979, 1985; Clegg and Dunkerley, 1980) have made; that all organization is essentially coercive in the capitalist labour process due to the fundamentally conflictual nature of technical efficiency and class exploitation. In particular, Burawoy's (1985) analysis of factory regimes proposes that structural conditions embedded in societal institutions mediate the balance between managerial controls which rely on coercion, and managerial controls which stimulate consent. However, the current study departs with Marxist theory, and to an extent, labour process theory in that it privileges human psychology and the nature of the dyadic exchange over the Marxist macro-focus of the contradictions embedded in the structure of broader society (Marx, 1976). In my research, the emphasis is on understanding the deep meanings volunteers attach to their relationship with the organization and the dynamic of control and autonomy emanating from these meanings.

co-produce meaning signify that even if it has no 'objective' factuality, coercive control discursively becomes implicitly assumed and thus 'real', in day-to-day interactions.

An example brings this proposition into sharper focus. The perceived underlying threat of managerial action which would be detrimental to local RNLI station (for example downgrading a station), including the withdrawal of symbolic rewards, evokes a socially constructed meaning – that this form of control is a distinct possibility – which informs members' actions, particularly those engaged in thick volunteering. For management, the essence of this control strategy is to subtly demonstrate their power in a bid to counter local stations' autonomy and perceived moral right of self-determination, on which I will speak at great length later. As I will show, 'ownership' of the voluntary service is held in constant contention between volunteers and paid management of the RNLI. Claims of ownership, and, by association, control, are generative – they provide meaning and shape the interpretation of events. This theorization sees power as relative (French and Raven, 1959; Raven, 1993; Kim et al., 2005; Bar-Gil and Gal, 2011) and as depending on the understandings and meanings through which each party interprets the relationship. In this way the 'virtual' presence of coercive power which I am alluding to becomes 'real' and 'experienced' in its effect on behaviour as each party considers what their alternatives are (Kim et al., 2005). This mutual construction acts as a nuanced and subtle technique through which control is evoked in voluntary organizations, which I shall empirically show in later chapters and discuss in chapter six.

A further example, that of volunteer careers, emphasizes the subtlety and interpretative complexity of this point. Although for most of the twentieth century the concept of work has been synonymous with paid employment (Pahl, 1988; Bradley, 1989; Glucksmann, 1995, 2000; Taylor, 2004), a growing body of research suggests that conceptions of career should be broadened and elaborated to allow for individual's private interpretations of a wider range of life activities (Barley, 1989; Kirton, 2006) such as voluntary work within organizations (Adamson et al., 1998; Marshall, 2000; Kirton, 2006). Thus, a volunteer's career is both a source of self-identity (Hughes, 1950; Barley, 1989; Layder, 1993; Grey, 1994) and a repository of meaning for volunteers, particularly, I would argue, in the case of those engaged in thick volunteering. In order to protect their volunteer career against undesirable penalties or sanctions (for example being un-volunteered or not selected for further training and advancement) volunteers need to present themselves in ways which match the perceived expectations of the organization (cf. Grey, 1994). By doing so, this is perhaps inherently an expression of avoiding an undesirable penalty.

Briefly concluding, this section has argued, notwithstanding claims to the contrary, that coercive control is experienced within the volunteer-HQ relationship and has consequences for the production of meaning and identity within the organization. The next section which discusses bureaucratic control progresses this review from the more subtly experienced to more obvious manifestations of organizational control.

2.3 Bureaucratic control

Theorizations of bureaucratic control stem from the pioneering work of the German sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920) whose interest in power and authority structures led him to characterize an 'ideal type' bureaucracy. In a broad sense, Weber observed a change in the social order whereby the authority structures producing order and compliance were increasingly moving away from traditional and charismatic bases to what he identified as a 'rational-legal' basis of authority. This changing social accomplishment concerning the sources of authority enacted to legitimately govern, led to a different form of organization, the bureaucracy, defined by rules and a series of hierarchical relationships (Weber, 1946).Characteristics of Weberian bureaucracy have been widely surveyed in the organization studies literature and can be summarised as follows:

(1) *Task specialization*: Jobs are decomposed into clear-cut, routine and well-defined tasks (standardization), so that job roles are differentiated into a fixed division of labour. Legitimated official rules demarcate clear definitions of authority and responsibility.

(2) *Rules and procedures*: Rules are formally codified (formalized) and specify the tasks to be done by different formal categories of personnel. Procedures are standardized, leading to the restriction of discretion. All employees are subject to rules and procedures that are aimed at ensuring reliable, predictable behaviours.

(3) *Authority hierarchy*: There is a clear chain of command between functionally separated tasks, structured as a vertical hierarchy of authority. This leads to a centralization of coordination, communication, and control in the organization.

(4) *Employment and career*: Personnel are selected and promoted on the basis of merit, formal credentials and/or seniority, and a career hierarchy of offices is produced.

(5) *Impersonality*: Organizational actions are impersonal because powers are exercised under the rules of the office rather than the person who holds that office.

(6) *Recording*: Acts and decisions are recorded in writing. This formalization contributes to organizational memory and along with rules and procedures, functions to achieve predictability.

(Sources: Weber, 1946; Buchanan and Huczynski, 2004; Clegg et al., 2008).

Within a typical bureaucracy, control is embedded in the structure through task specialization, differentiation, centralization, standardization and formalization (Walton, 2005). According to John Child, bureaucratic control is 'the attempt to ensure predictability through the specification of how people in the organization should behave and discharge their duties' (2005: 122). Fredrick Taylor's scientific management is the oft-cited classic manifestation of this control strategy, advocating specialization, simplification and the specification of standard methods for working (Taylor, 1967; Child, 2005). Research on bureaucracy's functions and effects has a long and detailed intellectual heritage within organization studies, with empirical research largely focussed on paid work. Space constraints limit any detailed review of the bureaucratic model here but excellent critical discussions include Perrow (1986), Jackall (1988), Mintzberg (1979), du Gay (2000), Ritzer (1993) and Kallinikos (2004).

Rochester et al. (2009a) argue that within voluntary settings there is widespread adoption of the techniques of managing paid staff, including the formalization of 'modern' (i.e. bureaucratic) structures, which assume 'an instrumental and rational approach to 'business'' (2009a: 221). Such formalization can run counter to the 'assumptions about informal friendly relationships' (Harris, 1998: 150) which apparently characterise nonprofit organizations. After reviewing the literature on volunteer involvement and management, Zimmeck (2001), with surprise, finds only two predominant models of volunteer management. She observes:

Although the multifarious types of volunteer-involving organizations ought logically to have generated multifarious models of managing volunteers to suit their portfolios of characteristics, they have not... there are but two models, best understood in the light of Weberian sociological theory – the 'modern' and the 'home-grown'. (Zimmeck, 2001: 15)

Zimmeck's important findings are summarised in the following table:

	Modern	Home-grown
Aim of organization	Most perfectly structured and efficient bureaucracy	Fullest expression of core values
Form of authority	Formal and universal: maximum application of rules and procedures	Informal and ad hoc: maximum application of values
Role of volunteers/employees	Equal (both 'human resources')	Different in principle but potentially equal in practice
Distribution of authority between volunteers and employees	Hierarchical, with volunteers subordinate to employees	Shared with volunteers and employees as partners
Control	Direct, formal	Indirect, loose
Social relations	Functional relations with	Permeable boundaries:

	managers and employees	personal/functional relations between and among volunteers, managers, employees, clients, members etc.
Criteria for recruitment and advancement	Process-based: equal opportunities, risk management	Intuitive: shared ideals and interests, friendships
Incentive structure	Intrinsic, with emphasis on most employee-like (expenses, training)	Intrinsic, with emphasis on fulfilment, enjoyment
Construction of tasks	Maximum division of labour (e.g. between 'intellectual' and 'mechanical'	Minimum division of labour
Construction of expertise	Specialist	Generalist

Table 2.1: Two models of managing volunteers (Zimmeck, 2001: 19)

Evidently, Zimmeck's modern model maps almost completely onto the characteristics of Weberian bureaucracy summarized at the start of this section, and with predictable results for what bureaucratic management means for volunteers. Empirical research suggests that volunteers wish to be supported in subtle ways that are not overly bureaucratic. In a survey of 2,156 UK volunteers, Machin and Paine (2008) found that eighty-one percent had not been given a role description, and of those, sixty-five percent did not want one as they felt it would make their volunteering too rigid and formal. Autonomy is sought and valued by volunteers (Harris, 1998; Rochester et al., 2009a; Wilson, 2012). Empirical research also finds that bureaucratic structures are associated with a loss of flexibility, creativity, social interaction and autonomy in voluntary organizations (Milofsky, 1988; Guirguis-Younger et al., 2005; Hutchison and Ockenden, 2008).

In their study of older adult volunteers in the United States, Tang et al. (2009) find that volunteers show more loyalty if they have role flexibility, that is,

choices regarding schedules and types of activities in which to participate. This suggests that the levels of flexibility volunteer organizations' allow volunteers' is meaningful to unpaid workers. In their study of fundraising volunteers in the Netherlands, Boezeman and Ellemers (2008) observe that commitment to the organization is based upon the perceived importance of the voluntary work, supporting earlier research by Galindo-Kuhn and Guzley (2001) that commitment, and, it can be inferred, meaningfulness, arises from task significance, an aspect of organizational life that bureaucratic structures are rarely found to support.

Low et al. (2007) warn against the experience of volunteering becoming too much like paid work, and in empirical studies Gaskin (2003) and Leonard et al. (2004) find that bureaucracy is off-putting and alienating to volunteers. Yet in terms of practical implications this must be tempered with other evidence which suggests that volunteers are looking to be managed (Gaskin, 2003) and that lack of work structure can be experienced as stressful (Taylor et al., 2008; Kreutzer and Jäger, 2011). To my mind, this sounds similar to much generic research reporting paid workers' experiences of organizations and management. Recently, scholars have begun to suggest that the traditional meanings of volunteering are under attack because of the imposition of bureaucratic forms of control. The ways volunteers are organizationally controlled are clearly significant to the meaning they make of their work and themselves.

Drawing on data collected from service-delivery volunteers within paid-staff led organizations, Rochester et al. (2009a) claim that the spirit of volunteering must be defended from formalization:

All too often, there has been a move away from volunteers and paid staff working collaboratively and sharing power and decision making; autonomy among volunteers has given way to the implementation of objectives by volunteers through carefully defined and delineated tasks specified and controlled by paid staff. (2009a:228)

Commentators of this persuasion argue that autonomy, skill variety and task significance are diluted by the business model 'modernist' (Zimmeck, 2001:19) volunteer management project. In her study of part-time paid, part-time volunteer workers in social services delivery in Canada, Baines (2004) convincingly contends that the standardization of service delivery leads to a Taylorization of work practices, replete with adjunctive surveillance provided by contemporary computer software which requires tasks to be completed exactly to a proscribed order. This expansion of management control over the volunteer labour process removes the opportunity for discretionary behaviour and causes frustration and negative perceptions of working practices among skilled and knowledgeable social workers. Feelings of frustration are succinctly summed up by this respondent, vexed at the loss of decision making power and control:

…the identifying issue may be the same but every person and family is different. We can't treat them all like little chocolates on an assembly line. Each person needs a different level of care and I, as a social worker, should get to decide that level in conjunction with the client

rather than a stupid form telling me how I have to work with each person. (2004: 279)

The lack of autonomy and associated process of deskilling changes the meaning of volunteering for this individual, as what was an empowering sense of self-efficacy now becomes a deskilled routinization. Ironically, standardizing work processes may also increase tension between volunteers and paid staff, as paid personnel can feel increasingly threatened by volunteers' ability to step into their now deskilled positions (Pearse, 1993; McCurley and Lynch, 1997). Rochester et al. (2009a) argue that the balance of power is wrongly skewed towards paid staff, who, through their insistence on formalization (manifested due to structural pressures such as funding rules under new public management), change the nature of the volunteering experience away from a fun, sociable and flexible arrangement to a more work-like, formal and regulated structure. Such processes of formalization hollow out the traditional meanings of volunteering, potentially even more so, I propose, for those engaged in thick volunteering:

We are already, for example, moving away from the notion that volunteers are involved in the identification of the 'problem' and its solution through creating their own roles and activities within and through organizations – instead we are increasingly recruiting volunteers into pre-determined posts that often leave little scope for creativity or autonomy and within which the balance of power lies

almost entirely with the organization and its paid staff. (Rochester et al., 2009a: 230)

Indeed, contestations around control and autonomy are endemic to all organizations, and perhaps voluntary ones more so because issues arise at both strategic and tactical levels. Rochester et al. *ibid* believe that volunteers should be both strategically and tactically involved in decision making, a view that presupposes volunteers' moral entitlement to autonomy and privileges volunteers' 'normative ideals of undertaking action they believe is right' (Jakimow, 2010: 553). Some research suggests that this perspective may have come about because of the lack of an economic relationship:

Since volunteers are unpaid, they often see themselves as untouched by organizational rules, or at least feel as if they have a right to some interpretive licence based on their unpaid status. (Bell et al., 2005:30)

I posit that, particularly with those engaged in thick volunteering, the moral voice inherently involved in volunteering is amplified when volunteers mobilize moral discourses which pivot on their sense of moral rights by virtue of ongoing sacrifice as unpaid workers. This is generally tempered by the managerial perspective that it is an individual's free choice to become involved in volunteering, and thus if they are so inclined, it can also be their free choice to un-volunteer if organizational rules and structures do not suit them. This dynamic will be discussed in greater detail in chapter six.

2.4 Clan control

Theorizations of clan control (Ouchi, 1979, 1980; Boisot and Child, 1988; Alvesson and Lindkvist, 1993; Turner and Makhija, 2006; Singh, 2008; Kirsch et al., 2010) can help explain how work is controlled when it is unwaged and how those engaged in thick volunteering experience control. Ouchi's (1979) seminal piece on clan control proposes that all exchanges between individuals require mediation due to performance ambiguity and goal incongruence. Drawing on Williamson's economic exchange theory (1975), Ouchi's thesis expounds three mechanisms of control – market, bureaucracy and clan – based on economic understandings of efficient responses to varying circumstances. Although the control mechanisms overlap and multiple modes of control may operate at any given time, clan control, based on socialization and an internalized system of values and norms, is purported to be most efficient, and thus most beneficial for managers to 'apply', when goal incongruence is low and performance ambiguity high; that is, when individual and organizational goals match, but there are multiple performance routes towards goals (Ouchi, 1979). Given, as I will later empirically demonstrate, the largely congruent goals and values within the case organization, the RNLI is a particularly illustrative example of a clan.

Although criticism may be levelled at Ouchi's framework because it presupposes that each of these mechanisms may be available for 'use', rationally chosen by managers and 'most efficient'[3], Ouchi's theorization holds much purchase in contemporary management thought (Eisenhardt, 1985; Kirsch, 1996;

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[3] This is a point I will return to on a number of occasions and will develop fully in the section on normative control.

Chan, 1997; Pawar and Eastman, 1997; Mayorhofer, 1998; Egri and Herman, 2000; Kirsch et al., 2002; Perrone et al., 2003; Hanlon, 2004; Singh, 2008; Kirsch et al., 2010) and offers a generative possibility for theorizing the life-experience of volunteers of the case organization. Clans are 'close-knit groups whose member's interaction is based on shared information, personal trust and equality' (Boisot and Child, 1988: 508). As such, clans display high goal congruence, shared values and norms, discipline towards their work and solidarity and regularity in their relations with each other (Ouchi, 1980). The characteristics of clans are perhaps those which are held up as ideals in voluntary organizations, founded as they are on assumptions of mutuality, cooperation and benevolence.

The underlying principles of clan control are closely linked to what earlier theorists describe as 'organic solidarity' (Durkheim, 1933: 365) and 'the condition of communion' (Barnard, 1968: 148). Durkheim refers to 'organic solidarity' (1933: 365) as the union of objectives connecting individuals which occurs as a result of their necessary interdependence. Barnard's 'condition of communion' taps into a deeper, almost primal conception of the individual as a social being. He declares:

> The most tangible and subtle of incentives is that which I have called the condition of communion…it is the feeling of personal comfort in social relations that is sometimes called solidarity, social integration, the gregarious instinct, or social security (in the original, not in its present debased, economic, sense). It is the opportunity for

comradeship, for mutual support in personal attitudes. The need for communion is a basis of informal organization that is essential to the operation of every formal organization. (Barnard, 1968: 148)

It is clear to see then, that theoretically, membership of a clan is a deep source of meaning for organizational members, and it is through this deep repository of meaning that a clan exercises control over its members. By attempting to be regular members of the group, individuals behave in a manner that is consistent with agreed shared norms (Kirsch et al., 2010). Current theorizations of clan control provide a telling instance of how, in general, mid-range management and organization studies theories overlook non-paid labour. Given the depth of commitment and involvement implied by thick volunteering, clan control may well help to explain organizational control in voluntary organizations, and in doing so, extend and enrich this literature, providing new scope and depth.

Within clans, members *co-construct* a shared belief system which provides a frame for value judgements, and consequentially influences members' behaviour. Of course, *this* explanation of clan control pivots on the notion that this form of a shared belief system is something quite natural, 'real', deep and spontaneous, even 'unmanaged' (Smircich, 1983) and genuinely co-produced by organizational members as opposed to being 'utilized' or imposed at a superficial level by the hierarchy (the latter being a reading of the concept which can be directly attributed to Ouchi's managerial standpoint). Although Ouchi draws on the softer aspects of Durkheim and Bernard, his framework is based on explicitly economic mechanisms.

In an insightful piece aiming to extend the solely economic basis of Ouchi's framework, Alvesson and Lindkvist (1993) argue that at least three types of clan – economic, socio-emotional and blood relationship – can be theorized. The first, economic clans, are based on exchange equity and resemble most closely Ouchi's conceptualization. In economic clans members believe that not acting opportunistically is a good way to achieve greater collective output, the benefits of which can be subsequently distributed fairly. Thus, whilst members co-construct a system of shared norms and values, their underlying motivation is instrumentally economic.

Socio-emotional clans deemphasize instrumental motivation and privilege individuals' social needs to belong and communicate. It is within this realm that commitment to the values of the organization are most closely related to Barnard's comradeship and solidarity, and it is socio-emotional clans which have most relevance to the development of my thick volunteering concept. As Alvesson and Lindkvist stress:

> That people act as close team members is here an expression of successfully creating a general feeling of solidarity and belongingness within the corporation… (1993: 442).

It is my argument that socio-emotional clans with their embedded forces for social-integrative control will most resemble the forces at work within the lifeboat stations of the case organization. My grounding for this proposition rests with the view that volunteering is not an economic transaction but a social and

psychological one, a point on which I have already spoken at length in chapter one. The blood relationship clan, a concept connected to 'biological imperative and consanguinity' (*Ibid*, p. 442; cf. Ianni and Reuss-Ianni, 1972) emphasizes the importance of family relationships in creating trust and predictability and may well offer added explanatory value in understanding how work is controlled at station level.

Interestingly, as it gives an insight into how the dynamic is supposed to operate, clan control is often theorized as a process of socialization (Singh, 2008; Egri and Herman, 2000; Turner and Makhija, 2006). Ouchi refers to 'an apprenticeship or socialization period' (1980: 138) which facilitates the development of shared personal goals under the already prerequisite common values and beliefs. The most significant point here is the assumption that the process of socialization alone leads to common values and beliefs. Indeed, on Ouchi's reckoning (1979, 1980) it is these collective frames of reference which demarcate clan control from market and bureaucratic forms. Given that volunteering is often conceptualized as an opportunity to live one's values (Pearce, 1993; Haski-Leventhal and Bargal, 2008), and I am suggesting thick volunteering even more so, clan control may indeed provide some deeper explanation as to how work is controlled when it is unwaged. However, it is my contention that volunteers' *genuine* commitment to these co-constructed norms, values and underlying belief systems will also be based on other psychological and affective mechanisms such as identification, pride of affiliation (O'Reilly and Chatman, 1986) and a stronger moral attachment. Part of this moral attachment may well be fostered and encouraged throughout a formal

socialization period, but socialization alone does not explain the full dynamic. To explain away the genuine commitment of those engaged in thick volunteering as a direct consequence of organizational socialization alone denies the impact of traditional kinship and community ties. Without being overly deterministic, in many cases the identity of the individual as volunteer is greatly influenced by familial ties to the local lifeboat, present and past. The ecological approach to volunteering stresses the significance of familial influence on identity (Kulik, 2007a; cf. Sundeen and Raskoff, 1994; Rosenthal et al., 1998; Flanagan et al., 1998) and furthermore, as I will show, narratives of the past, including storytelling (Gabriel, 2000) about precedent generations serve to possibly embed deeper expectations, indoctrinate values, heroize role models and mythologize proud traditions. This points to a more informal socialization process where potential volunteers learn the deeper belief systems which guide behaviour.

According to Ouchi (1980), the normative requirements, or 'basic social agreements that all members must share' (Ouchi, 1980: 137), in order for clan control to materialize are reciprocity, legitimate authority and common values and beliefs. Reciprocity theory, as developed by Gouldner (1960) works to deter potential opportunists. Legitimate authority, power accepted as legitimate, which in bureaucratic systems is usually performed under a rational/legal basis, mobilizes within clan control under the traditional form, where legitimacy in authority comes from belief in the sanctity of tradition or custom. Common values and beliefs signify the harmony of interests which, working in concert with reciprocity, eradicates the risk of opportunistic behaviour (Ouchi, 1980). In clan mobilizations of control, traditions act as implicit rules which govern

behaviour, 'functionally equivalent to a theory about how the organization should work' (Ouchi, 1980: 139). The moral basis of action is thus greatly informed by traditions and customs, which must be socially interpreted, and which, unsurprisingly, require years to learn (Van Maanen and Schein, 1979).

The role of the team leader in inculculating values is a line of questioning which is almost completely absent in clan control literature. In their empirical research on the control of information systems (IS) projects, Kirsch et al. (2002) hypothesize the mobilization of clan control in the relationship between IS project teams and client liaisons. They note how in some circumstances, the client liaison becomes a part of the IS project team clan by 'instilling, embracing and fostering shared values and goals among the project team and common approaches to working on the project' (2002: 497). I will return to this point in greater depth in the next section but it is clear that something needs to be said about the problematic underlying assumption of this work (notwithstanding, obviously, the crucial differences in empirical sites); the postulation that clan control is something which can be consciously manipulated and used by managers as they functionally roll out a plan of 'clan controlization' to rationally and efficiently control work[4]. Surely this use is incompatible with Alvesson and Lindkvist's (1993) well-developed understandings based on the work of Durkheim and Barnard, for whom clan control is a phenomenon quite natural, 'real', spontaneously and genuinely co-produced by organizational members and

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[4] Many other authors have made this point regarding cultural control generally, but not clan control specifically, for example Smircich, 1983; Van Maanen and Barley, 1985; Alvesson and Sandkull, 1988; Kunda and Barley, 1988; Alvesson and Berg, 1992 and Fitzgerald, 1988. It is also worth noting that 'attempts to manage culture *are* part of organization culture' (Grey, 2005: 73).

in turn reflected in their behaviour. What I am questioning here is, in its most extreme version, the dual assumption of conceptualizing those engaged in thick volunteering as sycophantic, docile, non-agents, living to a manufactured, managerially-promoted organizational culture (cf. Kunda, 1992) with the coxswain, as leader of the team, the embodiment of the all-powerful mediator of reality. In the current project, a thorough consideration of the crucial role of the leader (coxswain) in co-constructing or facilitating shared norms and belief systems leads to an enhanced understanding of clan control. Such a line of analysis not only provides deeper insights into the ways clan control operates at the level of the station, but also relates back to the question of who controls organizational meaning when work is unwaged. Literature on cultural control also helps to untangle this question, and it is to that I now turn.

2.5 Cultural control

This section seeks to theorize issues which are particularly under-researched in the specialist volunteering literature and to do so, draws extensively on the management and organizational studies literature. My particular interest lies in understanding how cultural control affects volunteers' lived organizational experiences and how managements use of cultural control influences perceptions of who controls organizational meaning, identity and ownership. It is important to make clear here that my primary concern is not with culture *per se*, but with how culture is experienced as controlling the actions, thoughts and feelings of organizational members, or, in more focussed terms, what does cultural control mean for the management of thick, perilous volunteers? As I will show,

theorizations of cultural control potentially offer fascinating insights into the management of volunteers, particularly at the level of understanding how volunteers and volunteer management construct and negotiate the realities they live by. Cultural control also facilitates understanding of the dynamics between control and autonomy, dynamics which can then be empirically analysed in the findings and subsequent chapters.

Culture is a particularly polysemous concept in organization studies, with many researchers recognising the difficulty in any attempt at defining culture, and adjunctively cultural control (e.g. Smircich, 1983; Alvesson and Berg, 1992; Meek, 1998). Previous reviews of the culture management literature have been comprehensive (for examples see Martin, 1985; Ogbonna, 1993; Legge, 1994 and Ogbonna and Harris, 2002) and it is not my intention to provide a full rehearsal of these debates. However, in order to understand how cultural meanings *control* experiences and behaviours, a brief outline of the broad tenets of this literature is important to set the context for my research. To that end, the following table, adapted from Schultz and Hatch (1996) who categorize research on culture into two broad categories is useful and should also serve to remind the reader of the paradigm in which my research is situated:

Dimension	Functionalism	Interpretivism
Analytical Framework	**Predefined and universal:** Similar levels and functions of culture are documented in all organizations	**Emergent and specific:** Opportunities for creation of meaning are unique to each cultural context
Model of Analysis	**Categorical:** Identification of cultural elements and discovering the causal relations between them	**Associative:** Reading meanings and exploring the associations between them
Analytical Processes	**Convergent:**	**Divergent:**

	Condenses and brings elements of cultural analysis together	Expands and enriches cultural analysis
Examples	Schein (1985, 1992) Peters and Waterman (1982) Deal and Kennedy (1982) Kilmann et al. (1985) Saffold (1988) Kotter and Heskett (1992) Denison (1990) Hofstede (1991)	Smircich (1983) Gagliardi (1990) Larsen and Schultz (1990) Kunda (1992) Czarniawska-Joerges (1992) Hatch and Ehrlich (1993) Höpfl (1995) Knights and Willmott (1995) Parker (2000)

Table 2.2: Contrasts between functionalist and interpretive assumptions of culture (Adapted from Schultz and Hatch, 1996: 537)

For functionalist proponents, culture is defined as 'organization-wide agreement with values espoused by top management' (Martin and Frost, 1996: 608). Essentially, advocates of corporate culture argue that managers can manipulate meaning by changing peoples' values, norms and attitudes and thus controlling employees through their own subjectivity and adherence to a hierarchically-defined set of specific organizational values. The control here lies in the ways that organization members internalize the ideology which is designed to 'intervene in and regulate being' (Grey, 2005: 68). Internalization of the ideology and values of the organization is purported to give rise to a self-disciplining form of subjectivity, whereby employees are controlled by their own adherence to organizational values. Organizational culture here is a 'critical variable', something an organizations 'has' (Smircich, 1983) and is defined by three prescriptive characteristics; the existence of a clear set of values, beliefs and norms which are unitary and homogenous, the sharing of these by the majority of members, and the guidance of employee behaviour as they adhere to this ideological set (Buchanan and Huczynski, 2004; cf. Martin, 1992). The

excellence literature (Ouchi, 1981; Peters and Waterman, 1982; Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Pascale and Athos, 1982), advocating the artificial creation of cultural control is a canonical example of this perspective.

By contrast, the interpretive view holds that organizational culture is in constant flux, with reality socially constructed by the interactions organization members have with each other and their environment. As such, the social world of organizations is ontologically constructionist and exists 'as a pattern of symbolic relationships and meanings sustained through the continued processes of human interaction' (Smircich, 1983: 353). Culture in this perspective is an 'ongoing social construction', a 'root metaphor' (Smircich, 1983; Parker, 2000), emphatically, something the organization 'is' rather than 'has'. Within interpretivist research, researchers aim to provide subjective accounts of organizational members' cognitive and affective reactions to ideological control, as Geertz explains:

> Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning. (Geertz, 1973: 5)

It is to Geertz's quest for a 'search of meaning' to which my research most speaks. It is an oddity that although the specialist volunteering literature is gradually becoming more integrated and sophisticated, there is almost no research in this genre which adequately considers and explains the experiences

of volunteers who are managed and controlled through hierarchically-defined forms of cultural control. Haski-Leventhal and Bargal's aforementioned (2008) research on volunteers working with street-children in Israel privileges individual agency and motivation whilst under-determining the role of structure (i.e. organizational control) in the meanings participants make of their volunteering, likewise with Lois's (1999) account of socialization in a voluntary search and rescue group. However, interestingly, in the latter of these accounts, group norms which speak more to the clan phenomenon of genuinely shared meanings are more prevalent and perhaps better explain the dynamic. In both accounts, crucially, departure from the volunteering group is explained by a lack of congruence of values, yet any possibility of a co-production of values is not considered. For this reason, perhaps the most relevant literature to consider here is that which focuses on volunteers' values and their initial reasons for joining particular voluntary organizations, a topic I will return to after presenting some organization studies literature on cultural control.

How does cultural control operate? Excellent critical interpretive research proceeds from the position that organizational culture is not, in practice, unitary or homogenous in the ways defined by the managerialist approach (Barley, 1983; Smircich, 1983; Gregory, 1983; Louis, 1983; Martin and Siehl, 1983; Riley, 1983; Van Maanen and Barley, 1985; Young, 1989). Clegg et al. (2008) note how researchers guided by the anthropological tradition voice concerns over the systematic exclusion of resistance, countercultures (de Certeau, 1988; Scott, 1990) and subcultures (Clark et al., 1976; Gagliardi, 1990; Willmott, 1993), especially in the light of multiple studies which find that

organizations are often unstable and characterised by conflict (Gregory, 1983; Cálas and McGuire, 1990; Meyerson, 1991; Martin, 1992; and more recently, Grey, 2012). Corporate culturalism advocates that 'excellent' organizations have cultures which are strong, that is, homogenous, whereas interpretive studies maintain that 'organizational cultures are always somewhat integrated, somewhat differentiated and somewhat fragmented all at the same time' (Grey, 2012: 167; cf. Martin, 1992, 2002; Parker, 2000). Given the diversity of actors embedded within the voluntary context, one should expect this to hold good in voluntary organizations.

Since the managerialist/functionalist perspective approaches culture as something the organization has, it also assumes that culture is capable of being created and manipulated by organizational founders and corporate leaders – for example, Schein, echoing others (e.g. Bass, 1985) contends that 'the unique and essential function of leadership is the management of culture' (1985: 317). Advocates of symbolic leadership treat managers as heroes who symbolize the organization to employees (Smircich and Morgan, 1982; Conger, 1991), who, for their part, internalise the desired norms and values, thus culminating in the 'proper' implementation of culture (Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Peters and Waterman, 1982). Along these lines, the purpose of management is to 'encourage employees to accept, even embrace, the goals and values of the *leaders* of the enterprise' (Ray, 1986: 289, emphasis added). Employees thus are expected to feel a sense of belongingness, identification with the firm and see their own interests as congruent with it (Pettigrew, 1979; Martin, 1980; Pascale and Athos, 1981; Bruce-Briggs, 1982; Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Peters and

Waterman, 1982). Again, the assumption of leaders' ability to lever culture in such a way must be questioned.

On the other hand, interpretivist research takes the perspective that culture 'emerges from the social interaction of *all* organizational members' (Meek, 1988: 462, emphasis added) and is a phenomenon more organic, spontaneous and unmanaged (Grey, 2005) than the functionalists would make out. Meek (1988) is particularly articulate in proposing, accurately in my opinion, that 'norms and values have as much potential for creating conflict within organizations as they do for creating social cohesion' (1988: 458). Furthermore, she continues:

> Most anthropologists would find the idea that leaders create culture preposterous: leaders do not create culture; it emerges from the collective social interaction of groups and communities. (1988: 459)

A further, empirical, blow to the credibility of management controlling culture is dealt by the work of Ogbonna and Wilkinson (1988, 2003). In their earlier case study culture-managed supermarket staff were encouraged to act friendly and smile at customers in order to promote an impression of customer service. The authors found that while staff superficially conformed to management's demands, they did not genuinely embrace the culture management programme (Grey, 2005; cf. Ogbonna and Wilkinson, 1988). Studies such as this prompt shrewd analysts such as Parker to insist on 'the importance of distinguishing between behaviour and conviction …smiling at customers because you are told

to do so is not the same as belief' (Parker, 2000: 24). A similar study by Ogbonna and Wilkinson fifteen years on, this time aimed at understanding the experiences of middle management, also found that culture management creates only 'resigned behavioural compliance' (2003: 1152). The authors point to numerous other studies showing equivalent results (Ackroyd and Crowdy, 1990; Anthony, 1990; Höpfl et al., 1992; Ogbor, 2001; Pecci and Rosenthal, 2001), indicating that, at best, attempts at culture management achieve compliance, but not embracement of the espoused culture. In summary, following Van Maanen and Barley (1985) and Fitzgerald (1988), Alvesson and Lindkvist conclude that 'we must be sceptical with regard to the possibilities' (1993: 445).

A related but different line of critique is that, even if not wholly successful, to a degree organizations actually can and do enact a self-disciplining form of employee subjectivity. This opens up debate on the moral consequences of management seeking, and sometimes achieving, the reformulation of internal worlds, identities and selfhoods of people at work. Gabriel notes how the prominence of 'meanings, values, symbols, archetypes and myths' in culture debates has de-emphasized the fact that 'control is rarely far beneath the surface' (1995:478). Furthermore, contrary to the excellence arguments that ideological control breaks down bureaucratic constraints, Van Maanen and Kunda (1989) find that this indirect form of control does not merely replace traditional forms, but is a complimentary control structure which supplements them. It is worth noting that culture management also happens in highly bureaucratic contexts, for example Ritzer (1993) and Bate (1994). Willmott (1992, 1993) argues emphatically that cultural control is 'more insidious and sinister than its

bureaucratic predecessor' (Willmott, 1993: 541). Parker believes the purpose of cultural control is to 'legitimate a version of organizations in which a managerial standpoint is articulated as central, in both practical and moral terms' (2000: 18). The sinister subtlety of the corporate culture project is explained by Hales:

> The power of organizational culture resides in the fact that it is not just another management 'technique' which can be applied at will, but is, rather, an influence upon behaviour which is not recognized as overt 'management'. The beliefs and values which shape employee behaviour are internalized, taken for granted and accepted as unobjectionable; therein lies their force. Culture can therefore exercise the most powerful and insidious form of control because it combines *de facto* compulsion with perceived freedom from coercion (Hales, 1993: 216, emphasis in original).

Hales's concern is accentuated by Parker, amongst others, who derides culturalism as 'a reflection of the need to gain control by disguising it and hence being able to solicit the responsible autonomy of the workforce' (Parker, 2000: 23; cf. Kunda, 1992; Willmott, 1993; Casey, 1995). In one of the most influential and, to my mind, brilliant pieces of organizational scholarship, Hugh Willmott contends how:

In the name of expanded practical autonomy [e.g. empowerment, self-management etc.] corporate culturalism aspires to extend management control by colonizing the affective domain. (1993: 517)

By effectively defining autonomy as obedience to prescribed organizational values, and manipulating the symbolic aspects of meaning, corporate culture 'invites employees to understand that identification with its values ensures their autonomy' (*Ibid*, p. 526). Agency for alternative values is limited and control is thus disguised in 'the rhetoric of emancipation' (Jermier, 1998: 235). By this shaping of the internal world (Willmott, 1993), the very identity of employees, through the manipulation of symbols, habit-inducing rituals, and privileging particular discourses and narratives at the expense of others, management effectively seek to override any potential contestations, struggle or conflicts of interest. In this way, like in the totalitarian system of Orwell's dystopian *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 'strength is ignorance and slavery is freedom' as corporate culture produces a 'normalizing, self-disciplining kind of oppression' (Willmott, 1993: 544). If autonomy means the opportunity for self-management, then cultural control ensures that it also means self-discipline by defining the very parameters of what employees can, and do, think and feel.

So what could this mean for thick, perilous volunteering? Returning to the debate on volunteer values, it is highly likely that those engaged in thick volunteering would resist cultural forms of control if they sense that the underlying values are shifting in directions far from their individual values or, indeed, accepted, co-produced group norms. For volunteers, identification with

the local group is more important than with the organization as a whole (Hustinx and Handy, 2009), but where values change away from those which motivate volunteer's desire to join the organization, and indeed their ongoing commitment, conflict is sure to occur. Dissatisfied volunteers have a high likelihood of leaving, and the research bears this out (Hellman and House, 2006; Hidalgo and Moreno, 2009). One useful empirical example is that of Kreutzer and Jäger (2011) which, although not specifically focussed on cultural control, examines the intraorganizational tensions which manifest when a non-profit organization, largely staffed by unpaid workers, shifts from an ethos of volunteerism to that of managerialism. Because volunteers sacrifice themselves for the cause and the organization, they strongly feel 'that the organization belonged to them and that they carried a huge part of the workload' (*ibid*, p. 644). I would suggest that those engaged in thick, perilous volunteering would experience these beliefs even more passionately, with huge implications for the possibility of their control. Furthermore, because there is no economic relationship, and volunteers do not have the inherent instrumental reasons for remaining within voluntary work, it could be proposed that volunteers *a priori* feel a sense of autonomy. As those engaged in thick, perilous volunteering derive much meaning from their autonomy whist at work (this will be shown empirically in later chapters), it seems impossible to conceive that a managerial imposition and manipulation of values, such as that outlined in the managerialist literature could hold good in this context. Furthermore, because the actual direct supervision by paid management of those engaged in thick volunteering is actually negligible in terms of time and space (group-level leaders provide much

greater levels), it is hard to see how paid management could enact 'a particular form of organizational experience' (Kärreman and Alvesson, 2004: 152) with so little direct, ongoing contact. The findings chapters will empirically examine these issues.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter of the literature review has set out the fundamental literatures in which my research is grounded. I initiated the chapter with Etzioni's classic moral-calculative distinction, which emphasizes my point that when thinking about voluntary labour, new insights and conceptualizations are necessary. At a macro level, the ideological reconciliation of the pursuit of a social mission on one hand and the 'assumptions of profit, self-interest and competition that are embedded within the idea of being business-like' (Sanders and McCellan, 2012: 2) on the other, have not yet been adequately researched (Herzlinger, 1996). Furthermore, the paucity of empirical research on voluntary organizations is problematic for organization studies and the current project seeks to ameliorate this overlooked aspect of organizational life.

The literature on bureaucratic control assists in integrating the most mainstream, recognised theories of organization studies (e.g. Weberian bureaucracy) with literature concerning the design and management of voluntary organizations and thus holds promise for theorizing possibilities apropos how work is controlled when it is not paid for. Clan control may also offer significant explanatory power in this regard but this literature is not without problematical assumptions. I have noted that much clan control literature is based on an

assumption of leader's calculated and mechanistic 'leveraging' of culture; an assumption I have also challenged in the section on cultural control. Significant challenges remain in building a plausible, credible, interpretive literature which accounts for the experiences of volunteers. To that end, this chapter has sought to somewhat integrate mainstream and volunteer literatures and in doing so, put forward, within the gaps, the research questions of this thesis. These research questions address both the control/autonomy debate concerning voluntary organizations, and also what I believe to be the most interesting and out-of-the-ordinary question of how meaning and identity are controlled in voluntary organizations. With that latter point in mind, the following summary table expresses the organization studies and management concepts of control vis-à-vis volunteering contexts. The next chapter then proceeds to introduce the case study organization and describe and account for the methodology used in this study.

Concept	Main insight & literatures	Applicability to volunteering context
Coercive control	Individuals are controlled by the threat of punishment in the form of penalties or sanctions French and Raven (1959) Etzioni (1961) Schlenker and Tedeschi (1972) Near and Miceli (1995) Driver (2002)	Not easily applied in this context, if applied in practice at all (Cnaan and Cascio, 1998; Farmer and Fedor, 2001). The applicability of the threat of economic punishment is not as strong as in paid employment relationships, although my research posits that volunteers are still controlled by their requirements for expensive resources. The mobilization of coercive control in a volunteering context is perhaps ethically dubious and politically illegitimate. Coercive power depends on the specific understandings each party apply to the relationship, thus coercive control may potentially work both ways in the volunteering context if volunteers feel that they are more indispensable than management, especially if it is not in managements' interests to un-volunteer an individual. As the perceived power balance between the organization and volunteers is important for positive relations between volunteers and paid management (Craig-Lees et al., 2008; Waters and Bortree, 2007), the relationship possibly becomes more 'hard' and 'bargained' with a high potential for conflict between paid staff and volunteers with regards to roles, tasks, authority and decision making (e.g. Knoke, 1990; Billis, 1993a, 1993b; Studer and Von Schnurbein, 2012). My research proposes that whilst moral- and emotional-based commitment better explains the volunteering relationship, coercive control still operates.
Bureaucratic control	The rational-legal basis of authority is embedded in rules, procedures and hierarchical relationships Merton (1940) Weber (1946) Gouldner (1954) Blau and Scott (1962) Price and Mueller (1986) Barker (1993) du Gay (2000)	Formalization and standardization are increasingly used as modes of control in voluntary organizations, particularly in light of funding, accountability and legitimacy requirements (Guirguis-Younger et al., 2005; Rochester et al., 2009a). Professionalization of the voluntary sector may result in the 'dominance of instrumental orientations at the expense of expressive goals' (Hwang and Powell, 2009: 270; cf. Frumkin, 2002; Skocpol, 2003; Putnam, 2007). Professionalization is also leading to perceptions that the use of volunteers is unprofessional in some contexts (e.g. Harmer, 2006). In practical terms, bureaucracy dilutes commitment and is off-putting to volunteers (Low et al., 2007; Gaskin, 2003; Leonard et al., 2004; Baines, 2004). Yet lack of work structure is also unappealing to volunteers (Brudney and Kellough, 2000; Taylor et al., 2008; Kreutzer and Jäger, 2010). The formal evaluation of work may seem to question volunteers' efforts (Cnaan and Cascio, 1998),

	Child (2005) Clegg et al. (2008) Adler (2012)	potentially depleting morale and commitment. Bureaucratic structures perhaps encourage the creation of core and periphery groups (cf. Lois, 1999) e.g. those who make the rules and those who must abide by them, which leads to organizational conflict. Authority vested in paid management may challenge the centrality of volunteers in definitions of organizational identity (cf. Hwang and Powell, 2009; Kreutzer and Jäger, 2011). Bureaucratic organizing may be morally and legitimately questionable beacuse emphasis is moved away from volunteers towards paid management (Zimmeck, 2001; Rochester et al. 2009a; Jakimow, 2010). Bureaucratic procedures may be perceived by volunteers as an ideological attack against the volunteering principles of mutuality, trust, cooperation and the centrality of volunteers. Defined rules and policies are potentially an organizational answer to limiting compassion, idealism and excessive emotional involvement with clients (cf. Wuthnow, 1995; Fox, 2006; Mellow, 2007; Haski-Leventhal and Bar-Gal, 2008). The management of risk, danger and liability concerns are key drivers of formalization (Gaskin, 2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c). The thick volunteering concept proposes that volunteers will push at the boundaries of formal rationality in order to gain and maintain substantive rationality, in practice subverting and resisting rules deemed to be impractical.
Clan control	Members co-construct a shared belief system which exerts control in the form of adherence to socially accepted norms Ouchi (1979, 1980) Boisot and Child (1988) Alvesson and Lindkvist (1993) Turner and Makhija (2006) Singh (2008)	Provides insight to how meaning and identity are organically controlled in voluntary organizations. Proposes that value judgements and some sense of a local, shared belief system will influence members' actions and behaviours. Perhaps an ideological ideal for voluntary organizations because emphasis is placed on shared agreement, participation, congruent goals and values, shared information, personal trust, equality, comradeship and solidarity (Barnard, 1968; Ouchi, 1979, 1980; Boisot and Child, 1988; Hoggett, 1994). Focuses on process of socialization which facilitates the development of shared goals, but is problematic as privileges the effect of socialization alone and not also identification, pride of affiliation and a stronger moral attachment (O'Reilly and Chatman, 1986). Problematizes the role of leadership and their ability (agency) to control the belief system and 'create' a feeling of solidarity and belongingness (Alvesson and Lindkvist, 1993: 442) (also cultural control).

	Kirsch et al. (2010)	
Cultural control	Managerialist orientation: culture is something the organization has and it can be levered by management through the manipulation of signs, symbols and rituals, with consequences for identity and organizational behaviour. Interpretive orientation: Culture is an ongoing social construction, something the organization is, and the opportunities for creating meaning are unique to each cultural context. Literature: see table 1.2	Given that they are not (usually) instrumental or (by definition) economic, the reasons that individuals engage in voluntary work are mainly symbolic (Farmer and Fedor, 1999). Attempts to monitor work can be regarded as 'a breach of trust upon which an individual's contribution was freely given' (Hoggett, 1994:5). Because volunteers do not expect to be subjected to scrutinizing business supervision, management and control (Rothschild-Witt, 1979; Milofsky, 1988; Harris, 1994), volunteer management can potentially use a less direct and obvious type of control in the form of culture management. Controlling volunteers through cultural/normative methods brings forth the following considerations: The effect of culture management on volunteers – how volunteers react to the management of how they are to 'be'; can volunteers be their authentic selves at work? What does it mean to volunteers to be an organization member and whether organizational culture in terms of shared values is, in practice, unitary or homogenous (cf. Barley, 1983; Smircich, 1983; Van Maanen and Barley, 1985; Martin, 1992, 2002; Parker, 2000). Questions whether a shared value and belief system is natural, spontaneous, organic and unmanaged or can be hierarchically managed and manipulated by powerful groups/leaders in the organization (cf. Smircich, 1983; Meek, 1988). The volunteering experience shapes the self-concept and personal identity of individuals (Farmer and Fedor, 2001; Haski-Leventhal and Cnaan, 2009; Grönlund, 2011).

Table 2.3: How meaning and identity are controlled in voluntary organizations

'With courage, nothing is impossible'
(Sir William Hillary 1771-1847)

CHAPTER 3: THE CASE ORGANIZATION AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introducing the case organization: The Royal National Lifeboat Institution

The RNLI is a charity registered in the UK and Ireland with the mission of 'saving lives at sea' (RNLI Vision and Values Statement, 2010). Operational volunteers, who assume risks voluntarily, provide on-call, a twenty-four hour, 365-day a year lifeboat search and rescue service around the coasts of the UK and Ireland[1]. Established in 1824 as the 'National Institution for the Preservation of Life in Case of Shipwreck' (NIPLCS) in large part from the efforts of the Quaker philanthropist Sir William Hillary, the institution was initiated to provide a professional though volunteer-based rescue service around the coast of the British Isles, a service it carries out to this day. The current title, the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) was adopted in 1854.

The Quaker background and beliefs of the founder can be seen as contributing to the ethos of the RNLI as an organization driven by Quaker values such as community-mindedness and social responsibility. Stinchcombe (1965) and, more recently, Buenstorf and Murmann (2005) have established that founders' initial choices of social forms have long-term developmental

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[1] The RNLI also provide a seasonal lifeguarding service on 160 beaches in England and Wales, flood rescue teams, sea and beach safety training and boat-building operation and have extensive fundraising activities, although this project concentrates solely on operations in all-weather lifeboat stations.

consequences, and I believe this is particularly reflected within the RNLI. Emden (1939) describes a 'burning passion for social justice…rooted in Quaker tenets' (1939: 88), and Child (1964), drawing on the work of Raistrick (1953, 1968, 1977), notes how 'the principle of democratic relationships in the workplace has long been held by Quakers' (Child, 1964: 295). Rowlinson and Hassard point to several historical accounts (Emden, 1939; Child, 1964; Corley, 1972, 1988; Bradley, 1987; Windsor, 1980; Jeremy, 1990) which 'more or less accept the idea that Quakerism itself made Quakers better employers' (1993: 314), with better attitudes towards industrial relations and labour management than peers of their time. It is worth noting, however, that other commentators on Quaker culture emphasise a different twist on Quakerism, one which deeply resonates with the current study:

> The great Quaker entrepreneurs of the last century…benevolent they might have been, charitable and anxious to improve the lot of mankind, but it tended to be a fatherly benevolence predicated on a view that *they* knew what was right and good for people. (Windsor, 1980: 3, emphasis added)

The early links to the Royal Navy have also been tightened throughout the organization's 188 year history. Of the original ten governors, three held senior positions in the Royal Navy and the first presidency of the institution was granted to a vice-admiral. Throughout the history of the RNLI a certain embedding process of Royal Navy personnel and procedures is visible, a

normative isomorphic tendency (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Galaskiewicz and Burt, 1991; Palmer et al., 1993), in an effort to enhance the legitimacy and credibility of the RNLI. This element of culture in structure remains to this day. The current chairman is Admiral the Lord Boyce and the current Chief Executive Officer was previously Chief Operating Officer of the Royal Navy. Such 'directional interlocking directorates' have been found to serve as important conduits of information and influence *a propos* organization structure (Palmer et al., 1993: 107, cf. Useem, 1983). The Royal Navy background of many paid staff at HQ and the particular set of beliefs and values which this brings are often understood as contributing to the military machine-like design and attendant militaristic command and control paternalistic ethos. Role titles such as 'staff officer' are a carbon copy of Royal Navy titles. This ethos is often understood as manifesting as arrogance, acknowledged from even the highest ranks. Here, a director of the RNLI explains how the basis of some organizational behaviour stems from attitudes of superiority backed up by the culture in structure:

> I think largely the RNLI is largely arrogant and certainly some of the behaviours we see, even my guys [direct reports], they would be setting requirements in contracts with people who are experts and would tell them how to do that! (Andrew, Director)[2]

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[2] The nature of the empirical study will be explained later in this chapter.

A second coxswain believes that this derives from the tight links with the Royal Navy:

> But one of the issues is, in the RNLI… and it's changing but it is there. The RNLI is virtually mostly retired Royal Navy officers. So there's a terrible arrogance in them and they talk to you as if you're crew of a battle cruiser, you know. (Frank, Second Coxswain)

So here we see how the early history of the RNLI (and of course subsequent temporal developments) not only leave trace elements which last to this day (for example the moral conceptualizations of what is right and wrong which are used as theory-in-practice, and in the contested forms of organizational identity), but also can serve to *explain* some organizational behaviour, that is, in referent to historical developments. It is not my intention to claim here anything close to an historical case study, but it is interesting to note how Weber, the founding father of organization studies, 'was convinced that in order to understand contemporary institutions, one has to know how they had developed in history' (Kieser, 1994: 609).

Originally, the NIPLCS/RNLI was supported by a range of wealthy philanthropists and aristocratic patrons in the face of reluctance by the British Admiralty and Government to take financial responsibility for a service of such kind (Cameron, 2002). This established the organization, from the outset, as being a non-state organization and thus not dependant on the state for funding and resources. To this day, ninety-eight percent of income is generated by the

public through an elaborate network of fundraising guilds throughout the UK and Ireland. Running costs of the service average STG£385,000 (approx €449,900[3]) per day and the lifeboat service receives no UK government funding (RNLI FAQ's, 2012) and only €150,000 per annum of grant aid from the Irish Government (Irish Government News Service, 2012). As at 31st December 2012, the RNLI had consolidated total net assets of £613.1M (RNLI Annual Report and Accounts, 2012: 14).

Dedicated independent lifeboat services, resourced by harbour boards and independent lifeboat associations had begun to appear around Britain and Ireland in the early eighteenth century (Cameron, 2002) and although the NIPLCS/RNLI certainly brought welcome funding, organization and expertise to local communities, Cameron (2002: 54) notes how, in the early years, local communities were frequently reluctant to hand over control of their lifeboats to the 'landlubbers in London'. This research argues that a version of this same core dynamic is in play to this day. Gradually, most independent lifeboat stations became subsumed into the institution and nowadays the RNLI is headquartered in Poole, Dorset, where a permanent paid staff of approximately 1,282 employees (RNLI Annual Report and Accounts, 2012: 28) oversee operations and fundraising for the 234 stations dotted around the coast of the UK and Ireland[4]. Poole is also the site of the Lifeboat Training College, a state-of-the-art

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[3] As at June 2013, source: www.xe.com

[4] Following independence from Britain in 1922, the RNLI retained primary responsibility for the provision of maritime search and rescue in the Republic of Ireland. Respondents' accounts tell the story that the RNLI, given the obvious political situation at the time, offered to pull out of Ireland, but were encouraged to stay by the heads of the new Free State. I have been unable to independently verify these claims. The official history of the RNLI simply and neutrally states '1922: The Irish Free State, which later becomes the Republic of Ireland, is founded. The RNLI continues to support the new state's lifeboat crews' (RNLI History of the RNLI, 2012).

training facility complete with simulator and sea survival pool. The fleet consists of 346 lifeboats ranging from five metres to seventeen metres in length, and some 4,600 operational crew members along with 3,000 shore-based helpers volunteer for the RNLI each year (RNLI Annual Report and Accounts, 2012:6). Overall, lifeboats were launched 8,346 times in 2012, rescuing 7,964 people and saving 328 lives (RNLI Operational Statistics Report, 2012: 8).

Ireland (North and South) is one of six geographical divisions of the organization, and has forty-four lifeboat stations of which twenty-three benefit from the presence of an all-weather lifeboat[5]. Lifeboats in Ireland were launched 955 times in 2012, rescuing 1,057 people and saving 44 lives (RNLI Operational Statistics Report, 2012: 6-8). Eight percent of operational volunteers are women, although there are no women coxswains (captains) of all-weather lifeboats in Ireland. Irish operations are overseen by the Divisional Inspector for Ireland and his deputies, co-located with the Irish fundraising branch in Swords, Dublin. Waged divisional staff such as trainer-assessors, engineers and administrators provide the operational, technical and administrative support for all lifeboat stations within the division.

3.1.1 The formal governance structure of the RNLI

The first charter of incorporation granted by Her Majesty Queen Victoria dates back to April 1860. Contemporarily, the Governors of the RNLI have the power to elect the Council, who appoint the Chairman and Trustees, who oversee the

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[5] Empirical research for this project was carried out in all-weather lifeboat (ALB) stations in the Republic of Ireland. All-weather boats are the largest of the fleet, and as the name suggests, are capable of launch in the strongest hurricane force weathers, as their self-righting mechanism ensures that the boat will re-float in the event of capsizing.

Chief Executive and Executive Team. Quite democratically, Governor Membership can be purchased by anyone for STG£86 a year and gives the member voting rights at the AGM.
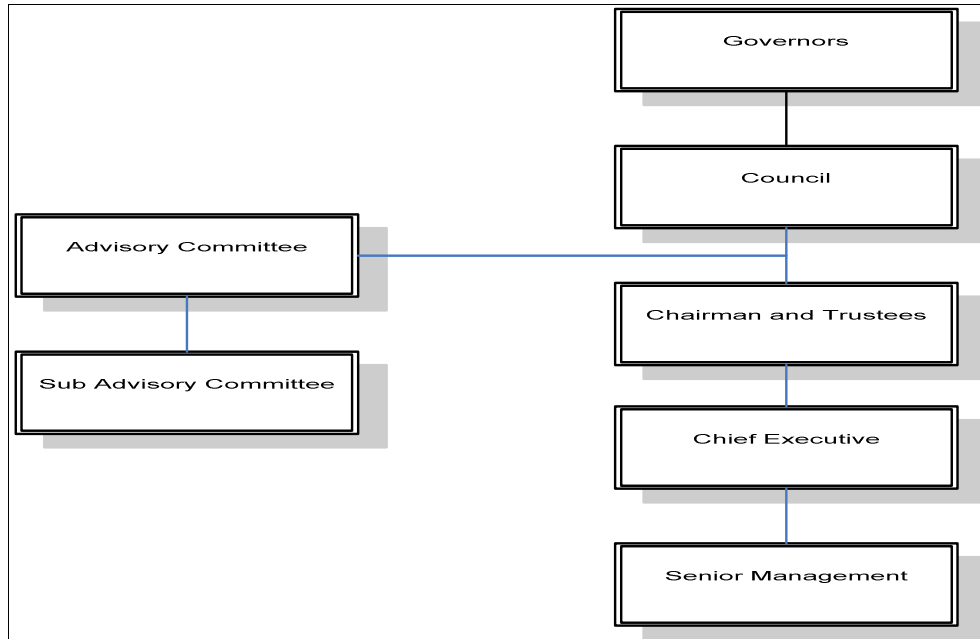
Figure 3.1: The formal governance structure of the RNLI

3.1.2 The RNLI's official vision and values

As they are entirely dependant[6] on public donations for funding, the RNLI are expected to be transparent, accessible and responsive. In line with a more general move in the charity and public sectors towards 'communicating who and what they are' (Wæraas, 2010: 527) in order to gain social legitimacy (Brunsson & Sahlin-Anderson, 2000), the RNLI use a vision and values statement as a way of presenting their (espoused) formal organizational identity (Aust, 2004), both to internal and external audiences.

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[6] The grant aid of €150,000 provided by the Irish Government does not even amount to 0.1% of the running costs required.

Artefacts such as vision and value statements must be treated with a degree of circumspection, if not outright suspicion. It must be recognised that these documents are not necessarily a reflection of reality (Atkinson and Coffey, 1997), nor do they automatically speak for the majority of organization members (Fairclough, 1997). The vision and values statement can, however, be conceptualized as an indication of how senior management would like to present the organization to outsiders and, indeed, insiders. By that I mean that the statement has potential use-value and political purpose. Understanding the vision and values statement as a discourse, one must realise that 'discourse does not merely describe things, it *does* things' (Hardy et al., 2000: 1231, emphasis added, cf. Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Grant et al., 1998). Discourse produces objects of knowledge, social identities and relationships between people (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). Hence the statement plays a role in the construction of social reality (Condor and Antaki, 1997) although it may well also be genuinely meaningful to other organization members. The most recent statement is that which was released in 2010, shortly after the arrival of a new CEO (Bennett, 2009):

RNLI Purpose: To save lives at sea
RNLI Vision: To end preventable loss of life at sea

RNLI Values:
Our work is founded upon and driven by our values. Our volunteers and staff strive for excellence and are…

Selfless …willing to put the requirements of others before our own and the needs of the team before the individual, able to see the bigger picture and act in the best interests of the RNLI. Prepared to share our expertise with organisations that share our aims.

Dependable…always available, committed to doing our part in saving lives with professionalism and expertise, continuously developing and improving. Working in and for the community and delivering on our promises.

Trustworthy…responsible, accountable and efficient in the use of the donations entrusted to us by our supporters, managing our affairs with transparency, integrity and impartiality.

Courageous…prepared to achieve our aims in changing and challenging environments. We are innovative, adaptable and determined in our mission to save more lives at sea.

Things we will not change:
Volunteer ethos…Our lifesaving service is provided wherever possible by volunteers, generously supported by voluntary donations and legacies.

Independent of government…We do not seek funding from central government.

Major charity, community based…We operate though local teams, centrally directed and resourced.

Maritime…Our exceptional expertise is in the preservation of life at sea and on the water through prevention and rescue.

Heritage…We are proud of our history and tradition and of the RNLI's achievement of saving lives over nearly two centuries.

(RNLI Statement of Vision and Values, 2010)

Figure 3.2 The RNLI's vision and values

3.1.3 Station organization structure and key personnel
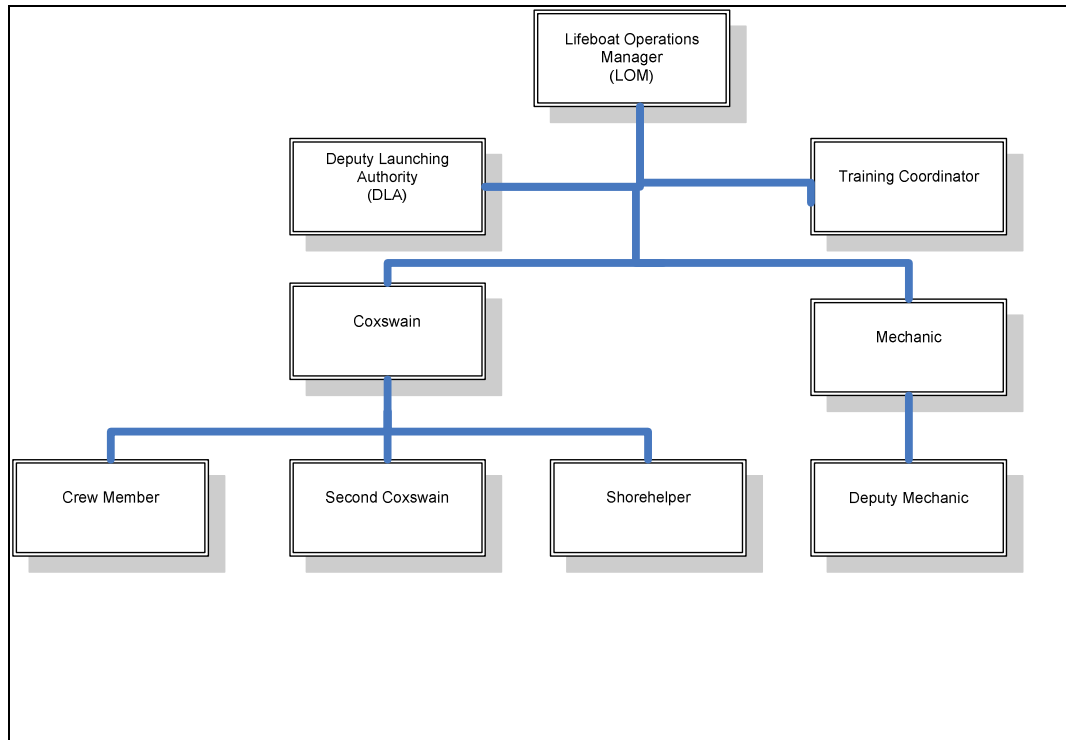
Figure 3.3: Organization chart of station operations team prior to lifeboat launch

Each local station typically consists of two distinct groups, the operations team and the fundraising team. Recently, RNLI HQ have decreed that an integrated lifeboat management group (LMG) consisting of representatives from both teams be established in order to coordinate all RNLI activities in the locality.

The lifeboat operations manager (LOM) is the head of the operations team at station level, in charge of the day-to-day activities of the station and commands the boat and station when the boat is not at sea. Deputy launching authorities, mechanics, coxswains, crew and shorehelpers are also part of the operations team.

When the coastguard makes a request for an asset[7], a launching authority (usually the LOM) is the individual who has the *authority*, on behalf of the RNLI, to decide whether or not the boat will go to sea. For this reason, the launching authority must try to remain objective and must never personally go out on a rescue (known also as a 'service', and more colloquially a 'shout'). The coxswain must have express permission from the launching authority in order to launch the boat, which is to say that the coxswain has no authority to launch the boat until the launching authority authorizes him to do so and devolves his authority over the boat. The reason for these checks and balances is to avoid any recklessness which may arise from the hyped-up, adrenaline-pumped emotive atmosphere which ensues moments after an asset is requested.

The coxswain is the person who is in charge when the boat is at sea and is legally responsible for the boat and crew. Typically they will be a local navigational expert with many years experience, and must have completed specialized RNLI training. In the main, the coxswain's position is voluntary however one station I interviewed in also had a paid coxswain. A paid coxswain is engaged as a last resort where sufficient voluntary cover cannot be arranged locally.

Each all-weather lifeboat station employs a full-time paid mechanic who is contracted to work forty hours a week and is requested by the RNLI to volunteer as required. The mechanic is tasked with the maintenance of the boat

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[7] As part of the overall Irish National Maritime SAR framework, the responsibility of coordination of sea rescue rests with the Irish Coastguard. The RNLI declares its assets as available to the coastguard and any request for a lifeboat launch 'should always in the first instance be routed through a Coastguard Coordination Centre' (Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport of Ireland, 2010: 37). In practical terms, this means that the Coastguard contacts the LOM/Launching authority to request a launch.

and station, liaising with the engineering and supply department for updates, parts and information, and training the second, third and emergency mechanics. The mechanic's role has high implications for organizing as they are often the only full-time employed person at a station, and so gain an informal social standing by virtue of their regular presence. Here, a mechanic wittily explains his role:

> Me: What do you see your role as being?
>
> Respondent: (Laughing) Mother, father, Jesus do you really want to know?! Psychologist…it's literally everything from man management, well first of all it has to be the boat, my first role is the upkeep and maintenance of the boat. That has to be, because they [the crew] hope that I have done the right job so when they do go out in any conditions, everything is going to work and they feel safe. (Pat, Mechanic)

Almost all volunteers start off in the RNLI as a crew member. Crew members are probationers for the first six months of their membership, when they are not supposed to go to sea in the lifeboat and instead have to demonstrate their commitment by attending to menial jobs such as cleaning the boat and station. Once they have proven their commitment, crew members are trained locally and at Poole. The typical ALB going on a shout will have six or seven crew, one coxswain and a mechanic. Crew are trained in sea survival techniques, first aid, fire-fighting and boat handling, and some, if they so choose, are trained in the more specialised subjects of navigation and radio communications.

On land the LOM is the overall manager, the coxswain and crew are dispersed, and the station must answer to HQ. I noticed that crew informally report to the coxswain (he is characterized as 'the boss'), who feeds upwards to the LOM. All of the stations I interviewed in had multiple members of the same family involved (in one of the stations investigated there were six members of the same family, another had five) a matter which I shall discuss in detail in chapter five. Massive emphasis is placed on training for redundancy of function, with members being trained as second, third and emergency coxswains and mechanics. Each station must also designate a training co-ordinator who plans and organizes ongoing training and manages the training records on the SAP software system. In two of the four stations I interviewed in, the coxswain also held the training co-ordinator role, which signifies the importance of this role at station level.

The RNLI is a very distinctive organization as there is a switch of mode of organizational governance and control when the boat is launched (this is a key analytic marker in this study and will be discussed in great detail in chapter five). Once the water hits the boat[8], the coxswain is in charge and the boat is autonomous from its local station and, crucially, RNLI HQ. The work on the water is completely different to the work on land (cf. Barley and Kunda, 2001), and the structures of power within the organization, formal and informal, change extensively when the lifeboat is launched. In accordance with maritime legislation, the coxswain is legally responsible for the boat and crew, which is

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[8] I recognize that this is an unusual figure of speech, but as most ALBs are housed in boathouses with slipways, when the order is given to 'knock out' the holding pin, the rule is 'when the water hits the boat' this signifies the handover of compete authority, legal and normative, to the coxswain.

quite astounding considering that he or she, more often than not, is a volunteer[9].

When a rescue is initiated and the boat launches there is a very definite

devolution of decision-making power to the coxswain, who from that moment on

is responsible for the safety and welfare of all on board. Members are socialized

from original recruitment not to question the coxswain's judgement. Offshore,

the lifeboat is firewalled from RNLI management, hence a structural and cultural

organizational change depending on whether the boat is at sea or not. The

following response from a coxswain elucidates the meaning that is attached to

the on/off the water distinction:

What we have done, because we wanted people to feel as free and as

happy around the station as possible, so in the station as a coxswain I

am nothing other than another member of the crew. I get the same

banter and blaggarding[10] as everyone else. Where we draw the line,

firmly draw the line is when we go on board the boat. The very instant

the coxswain goes on board the boat nobody questions him. His word is

final. There is even no second glance to a coxswain on board. So we

define the role so that people feel very comfortable at the station and in

debates as regards training and everything else, but it doesn't matter

who is the coxswain, full-time coxswain, second coxswain or deputy

second coxswain, we have it clearly defined that once that man steps

---

[9] The RNLI provides insurance cover for coxswains and crew.

[10] Derivation of black guarding, meaning 'a man who behaves in a dishonourable or contemptible way' (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2012). Commonly abbreviated to 'blaggard' in Irish slang and used to infer joking, messing, horseplay.

aboard the boat, as long as he is coxswain or appointed coxswain he is

in total charge and their word is the final command. (Seán, Coxswain)

3.1.4 The Volunteer Commitment

In an effort to reduce ambiguities which pose limits to managerial control

(McCabe, 2010), enhance sensegiving (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991) and extend

a more concerted effort to manage the psychological contract (Rosseau, 1996;

Guest, 1998; Conway and Briner, 2005) between volunteers and RNLI

management, RNLI management have developed a policy called 'The Volunteer

Commitment' which is disseminated to each volunteer in the form of a booklet

entitled 'Operational Volunteers at Lifeboat Stations'. My interpretation of the

document is that it has a use-value for management because it is an attempt to

discursively construct particular meanings in order to enact espoused value

realities for volunteers, or as Hellgren and colleagues put it, the purpose of the

document is 'to influence the conation of the audience in order to gain

acceptance for a specific claim or claims' (2002: 127, cf. Fairclough, 1997). This

document begins with the dominant, legitimating voice (Fournier, 1998;

Hellgren et al., 2002) of the Operations Director:

'The relationship between the RNLI and its volunteers is a voluntary, two-way commitment, not a legally binding contract. However, for this relationship to work well, it is important for us all to understand what roles and responsibilities each other expects. That is why we have decided to draw up a clear set of policies covering the role of volunteers and their relationship with the RNLI'
Michael Vlasto, Operations Director, February 2006

The RNLI will:
- Welcome you as a volunteer and provide appropriate opportunities to those who can help us achieve the RNLI's purposes
- Provide you with appropriate training and equipment for the task

- Give guidance and support your development in your volunteer role
- Ensure you have a safe working environment so far as is reasonably practicable
- Listen to your concerns if things aren't going right
- Recognise that you are a volunteer and have other commitments
- Treat you and all volunteers equally and fairly

In return, we ask you to:
- Commit to necessary training and give us your time
- Comply with agreed standards
- Be professional and loyal to the RNLI
- Be fair to those around you
- Talk to your RNLI colleagues (volunteers or staff) first if you have a problem

(RNLI Volunteer commitment, In *Operational Volunteers at Lifeboat Stations* booklet, 2006: 2-3)

Figure 3.4: The Volunteer Commitment

Having explained some of the key features and context of the case organization, I will now proceed to show why I believe the RNLI is a distinctive organization, and why this is such an unusual case (Siggelkow, 2007). I will then move on to explaining the methodology I used whilst undertaking the research.

3.1.5 A distinctive organization

The RNLI is in many ways a highly unusual organization. Perhaps most significantly for this thesis, it is unusual because it relies on volunteers to work in a dangerous environment in order to achieve its goal of saving lives at sea. I have already made the point that empirical studies of voluntary organizations are extremely rare in the mainstream organizations studies literature. The thick volunteering identified at the RNLI, coupled with its dangerous nature, opens up a theoretical distinction as it makes for a particularly complicated dynamic in a previously undifferentiated category.

The RNLI is also distinctive because, apart from a few community-based lifeboats dotted around the coast of the UK and Ireland, the RNLI *is* the *institutional field* (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; in the context of the RNLI specifically, this point has also been made by Wilson and Butler, 1983). The RNLI is internationally recognised as 'providing one of the most effective and dependable search and rescue services in the world' (RNLI International Development Publicity Material, 2012) and is widely accepted as the benchmark to which similar organizations in other countries aspire.

Although it is not the specific focus of this study, the crew on the water can be categorized as an extreme action team (Sundstrom et al., 1990). Klein et al. elaborate extreme action teams as 'teams whose highly skilled members cooperate to perform urgent, unpredictable, interdependent, and highly consequential tasks while simultaneously coping with frequent changes in team composition and training their teams' novice members' (2006: 590). This absolutely speaks of the work of the RNLI. Klein et al.'s (2006) study is based on extreme action medical teams in an emergency trauma centre whose tasks, akin to those of RNLI crews, necessitate 'swift coordination, reliable performance, adaptation and learning' (*Ibid*, p.590). Of course there are obvious differences between Klein et al.'s research site and this – firstly, the members of the medical team are all paid staff, and secondly, their own lives are not put in danger by attempting to save the lives of others – what is at stake in the context of the RNLI is the interlinkage of thick, perilous volunteering. Nevertheless, the findings of that study revealed a shared leadership within the team, specifically 'dynamic delegation of the active leadership role' (p. 590). However, within the

RNLI crew whilst on a rescue mission there is no denying the influence of the single formal leader – the coxswain. Respondents' accounts unanimously identified the coxswain as leader of the team whose authority is unquestionable. For example one participant voiced: 'Once the boat is at sea the coxswain is the be-all and end-all really' (George, Second Coxswain). This will be explored in greater detail in chapter five.

Also, because it is a voluntary organization, the RNLI is different to other emergency services as it is not an organ of the state or an expression of state power, nor, as I outlined in section 3.1 of this chapter, has it ever been so; it may be understood as an expression of communal moral purpose and need, which I will discuss at great length in chapter five. Other research empirically sited in dangerous working conditions such as Thornborrow and Brown's recent analysis of identity and discipline in the British Parachute Regiment (2009), Desmond's (2007) account of the US Forest Service and Weick's (1993) interpretation of the tragic events at Mann Gulch all focus on state agencies whose employees are paid. Again, although it is not the specific focus of this thesis, the RNLI can be characterized as a high reliability organization (Weick et al., 1999). The five hallmarks of high reliability organizations are (1) preoccupation with failure, (2) reluctance to simplify interpretations, (3) sensitivity to operations, (4) commitment to resilience and (5) deference to experience. These are all characteristics which the RNLI exudes and actively seeks in its operations, locally and at HQ.

Research undertaken in empirical sites of dangerous working conditions is relatively rare in the organization studies and general management literature,

with some exceptions highlighted below. In (mainly) sociological literature, coalmining has been used to underpin many theories of loyalty, trust and solidarity implicit in dangerous-work settings (Parry, 2003) and care-work, paid and unpaid, been used to study violence in workplaces (e.g. Baines, 2004, 2006; Littlechild, 2005; Virkki, 2008; Baines and Cunningham, 2011). Police work (e.g. Van Maanen, 1980; Brewer, 1990; Tracy and Tracy, 1998; Dick and Cassell, 2004; Dick, 2005), the work of the armed forces (e.g. Thornbarrow and Brown, 2009) and fire-fighters (e.g. Weick 1993; Scott and Myers, 2005; Desmond, 2007, Colquitt et al., 2011) have all been used to empirically develop (some very major) concepts which aid organizational understanding. Lois's (1999) excellent ethnographic study of the socialization of team members into a voluntary mountain rescue organization provides some fascinating insights into the co-production of team norms in dangerous settings, although it is very tightly focused on socialization processes and the tensions between individualism and collectivism, which is not a central research focus of the current study.

My substantive point here is that conceptualization of dangerous work is still very fragmented. For example, to some commentators dangerous work is framed in terms of the economics of wage compensation for dangerous duties (Dorman, 1996; Dorman and Hagstrom, 1998). Studies on dangerous work are so loosely connected that one can hardly speak of 'a (body of) dangerous work literature'. Yet wouldn't such a thing be interesting? No doubt this deficiency is embedded within larger issues within the organization studies field[11] – the

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[11] As Grey (2009, 2010, 2012) citing many others (Mone and McKinlay, 1993; Weick, 1996; Greenwood and Hinings, 2002; Starbuck, 2003; Czarniawska, 2008; Gabriel, 2010; Suddaby et

'narrowness of its range' (Grey, 2009: 313; cf. Rehn, 2008) coupled with (or caused by, depending on one's point of view) demands from business schools for increased corporate relevance. This research breaks from the narrow corporate focus of current organization studies, attending to the fact that not all work takes place in the relative safety of the office.

It is clear that the working environment for volunteers is highly unusual. Due to the offshore nature of the work, there is very little back-up for the crew of a lifeboat if the rescue is very difficult and becomes a life-and-death situation. Crew self-conceptualize as being different from other emergency services such as the ambulance or fire brigade because they have very limited back-up. I asked a station volunteer 'if you had to explain to somebody who had never heard of the RNLI, "who are the RNLI" what would you tell them?' His response:

Well that's hard [knocks at floor], that's soft and wet [indicates to sea] when you get into trouble here it's somebody else [that will help you], when you get into trouble out there it's us. That's it. (Luke, Crew Member)

Occasionally, volunteers are forced to deal with horrendous physical working conditions, such as hurricane force wind, waves and storms. In 2012, almost ten percent of launches were in winds of strong breeze up to and including violent storm (RNLI Operational Statistics Report, 2012:8)[12]. A strong breeze produces

al., 2011) recognizes, 'something has gone badly wrong with the field of organization studies' (2012: 5). I will return to this point in chapter seven.
[12] These are overall figures for the service as Ireland-specific are not available.

a wave height of three to four metres and a rough sea. Forty- one percent of lifeboat services in Ireland were performed in darkness in 2012 (RNLI Operational Statistics Report, 2012: 8), adding to the already dangerous and frightening setting. Sea-sickness and mental pressure can combine in potentially lethal ways as coxswain and crew toil to enact a successful rescue. Here, a coxswain explains how difficult the working conditions can be for those on the lifeboat, even those with considerable years of experience:

> I mean everyone on the boat gets sick, even me. And I've been working on boats for twenty-six years now. You die. You wish you were dragged off the face of the earth some days. (Daragh, Coxswain)

A second coxswain speaks of the ordeal and hardship, mentally and physically, as a result of these working conditions:

> If you are going out in difficult conditions in high waves and high seas and it's dark, that's the sort of things that will really test guys because you can't see what's coming at you and you are getting thrown around the place. (George, Second Coxswain)

Below is a striking example of the difficult and at times harrowing and tragic situations, physical and psychological, which face volunteer crew:

A woman went over the side of the ship off one of the ferries early this year, and we actually spotted her in the water, she was dead, she was in the water three or four hours, and I went over the side, clipped on and the first thing that came to my mind was I better not let her go, I just put my arm around her and we got her in. But the main thing was just don't let her go, don't lose her…bring her home. Don't let her go. (Mick, Second Mechanic)

The difficult working conditions also arise in part when/because the lifeboat is responding to accidents. The sequence of events which has lead to an accident can leave the casualties in a state of chaos, with loss of habituated action patterns and structure, which triggers confusion and contributes to further mishap. The crew, whilst continually mutually sensemaking (Weick, 1988, 1993, 1995; Weick et al., 2005) under pressure (Cornelissen, 2012)   must also provide structure and sense for their casualties, many of whom are suffering from shock or are otherwise disabled to assist in their own rescue. Volunteers must also take responsibility for managing their own skills and recognising their own abilities in order to avoid the disastrous 'rescuer-turned-victim scenario' (Lois, 1999: 126). In sum, the conditions experienced by coxswain and crew explained here are, undeniably, highly unusual in organizations and organizational research.

'In dreams begin responsibility'
(W.B. Yeats 1865-1939)

3.2 Methodology

3.2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this section is to discuss the methodological aspects of my empirical research at the RNLI and specifically, to explain the series of decisions I made about on what, on whom and most significantly how to do the research. By drawing the reader's attention to the ways in which the data was created, analyzed and reported, 'the reader can make up their own mind about the 'biases' or 'spins' of the writer' (Watson, 2000: 502; cf. Hardy and Clegg, 1997). As Parker acknowledges, 'the researcher, the researched, the writer and the reader are always implicated in each other' (Parker, 2000: 238). In order to make the research process more transparent it is important to acknowledge here that some aspects of the methodology were consciously planned-out well in advance (qualitative research, case study research with data collection mainly through semi-structured interviews), and others (number of interviews, access to interviewees, decision on whether or not to use N*Vivo) were an outcome of chance, luck or choice of what I thought at the time to be the best methods to answer my research questions. So within this narrative which I am constructing about the methodology, I must acknowledge an element of *a posteriori* rationalization and justification (Weick, 1999, 2002), as is the case for all such accounts.

3.2.2 Research aims and objectives

The focus of my research changed significantly mid-project. My original research aim was towards understanding the enactment of cellular organization (Mathews, 1996; Miles et al., 1997) within the RNLI with a concentration on the active ways in which the self and organizational understandings of actors reproduce or possibly undermine the formal structure. However, as I collected and analyzed the empirical data, I gradually realized that the data did not support the original proposal in that cellularity did not appear to inform respondents' understandings of organization. A richer, deeper and more complex and profound story was being articulated by respondents, a narrative in which control, autonomy and contestations around ownership and organizational meaning were at the forefront of respondents' individual and organizational understandings of being a volunteer in a dangerous work context. In August 2011 I decided to refocus the topic of the thesis in accordance with these findings.

3.2.3 Qualitative research

Given the focus on individual and collective subjective *experiences* of work, this empirical research is qualitative in nature: I aim to present an in-depth understanding of human behaviour and the reasons that govern such behaviour. As Van Maanen defines qualitative research:

It is…an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not

the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in

the social world. (1979: 520)

Qualitative researchers 'study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them' (Denzin and Lincon, 1994:2). My concern was with understanding the meanings volunteers attached to their work and organization and how the control and autonomy dynamic played out between the formal headquarters (internationally), divisional headquarters (nationally) and the local organization (station level).

3.2.4 Philosophical commitments

This research was guided by the interpretive epistemological paradigm in social studies which seeks to provide understandings of human behaviour and how individuals make sense of the world around them. The research is about people and their institutions, specifically the exercise of control over unpaid work and organizational meaning and identity. This aim of an in-depth understanding of the meaning of the concept for those involved, *Verstehen* (Weber, 1946), reflects the need for a research approach that respects the fundamental difference between natural and social science, and allows researchers to grasp subjective meanings, particularly in this context of the interplay between RNLI management and unpaid volunteers over claims of ownership of the lifesaving service, the boat and organizational meaning. Ontologically, the research was guided by a social constructionist perspective which regards administrative science as 'a fundamentally subjective enterprise' (Astley, 1985: 497) in which

we interpret reality through our own conceptual filters, imputing meaning and significance to our own interpretations (Daft, 1983).

3.2.5 Research design

Given a research situation in which the operating context of the organization is an extremely important factor in understanding the behaviour of respondents, I chose a case study design. Guided by an interpretivist epistemology, I wished to 'retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events' (Yin, 2009:4). Case study design allows for research situations such as this, where 'the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident' (Yin, 2009:23). The phenomenon under inquiry – the mobilization of organizational control over volunteers and the interplay between this and volunteer responses – cannot be satisfactorily considered in isolation to the context in which volunteers operate – they are unpaid workers in a dangerous environment. As Siggelkow asserts:

> It is often desirable to choose a particular organization precisely because it is very special in the sense of allowing one to gain certain insights that other organizations would not be able to provide. (2007:20)

I have argued that the RNLI is one such organization, a highly unusual organization precisely because of its context – that ninety-seven percent of workers are volunteers, and that these volunteers carry out their work in a

dangerous working environment. It is my view that the RNLI provided an excellent extreme case from which to build theory about, *inter alia*, organizational control, thick volunteering and perilous volunteering (cf. Eisenhardt, 1989; Pettigrew, 1990). As Pratt contends, 'extreme cases facilitate theory building because the dynamics being examined tend to be more visible than they might be in other contexts' (2000: 458). This is not to say that some insights gleaned from the RNLI may not be relevant to other more normal organizations (cf. Flyvbjerg, 2006) but I do not claim generalizability on the basis of this sample, which may or may not have been representative. The representation of the RNLI which I constructed is only one among many other possibilities (Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Van Maanen, 1988). It is also important to acknowledge that the non-profit charity sector is hugely broad and diverse, with significant differences between organizations in size, scope, function, mission and role in society (Donnelly-Cox et al., 2001; O'Neill, 2002; Salamon, 2003). Nonprofit organizations '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 tensions and dynamics in the relationship between management and volunteers (cf. Sanders and McClellan, 2012).

A case study design allowed for the combination of different sources of evidence (Yin, 2009) such as interview data, documentary data and participant and non-participant observation, sources which were valuable in providing answers to my research questions. Taking this approach also allowed me access

to a variety of responses, and with these, the opportunity to engage with 'a particular sensitivity towards the possibility of variation and contradiction, and its meanings and consequences' (Kärreman and Alvesson, 2004: 155, cf. Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000).

3.2.6 Access to the RNLI and selection of research sites

My first contact with the RNLI was in 2007 as a Masters student in University College Dublin. In my dissertation project[13], I analysed the RNLI as a cellular organization (Mathews, 1996; Miles et al., 1997; O'Toole, 2007; McGrath and O'Toole, 2008, 2009; O'Toole and McGrath, 2010) and had originally made contact with the RNLI through an introduction from a fisherman neighbour. In order to gain access at station and divisional level for this project I re-initiated communication with my old contacts requesting introductions to other stations. This 'branching out' (McCabe, 2007: 248) was guided by a theoretical sample (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Eisenhardt, 1989) which I drew up based on an urban/rural and east coast/west coast divide in order to create better possibilities of capturing any regional specificities in Ireland[14]. I secured access to HQ by writing a letter to the Chief Executive and explaining my proposed research.

3.2.7 Gender and image management

Lifeboating in Ireland is almost an exclusively male affair. Although women play an increasing role in the support functions of maintaining a working station

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[13] It is important to note that no material used for my 2007 dissertation was used in or for this thesis.
[14] See data collection schedule in appendix B.

(Hennessy, 2010), only eight percent of crew are women and in Ireland there are no female coxswains of all-weather lifeboats. Overall, four of my forty respondents were female. At station-level, only one female was interviewed[15]. It would be naïve to think that my gender did not have some impact on not only on my ability to elicit responses but also on the types of responses revealed by participants. Silverman (2000) has found that female researchers are sometimes accorded more privileged access than male researchers because they are perceived to be less threatening. Gender stereotypes suggest that respondents felt more comfortable being emotional in interviews on account of my being a female researcher (Padfield and Proctor, 1996). On one occasion, when recounting a particularly harrowing episode of lifeboating, a male respondent became very emotional. I immediately asked if he wanted to stop the interview but he said that he was happy to carry on and it was 'just something you have to deal with'. I sometimes wondered if male respondents performed their caring, softer, almost sadder sides to the audience of my female persona, and if so, whether a male researcher would have had different findings to mine.

I took an active role in trying to be perceived by respondents in ways which would make talking to me 'safe' in terms of integrity and privacy (Bott, 2010). All informants were promised anonymity and assured that comments reported would not be traceable to them personally. I consciously represented myself (cf. Mazzei and O'Brien, 2009) in ways which I felt would disarm

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[15] It would be possible to focus on how the gendering of particular skills and values affects the perception of lifeboating as 'a man's job', and whilst that issue may be particularly suitable for further research, it is not my aim here. For a good overview of the literature see Smith et al. (1998), also the recent insightful analysis of Denissen (2010). For a specific, symbolic examination of gender in organization culture see Gherardi (1994). My purpose here is to briefly reflect on the influence of my gender as a female researcher in both gaining access to the RNLI and as a possible mediating factor in the types of responses I elicited from my respondents.

respondents in order to gain access and build rapport, two of the most fundamental aspects of conducting successful field research (Adler and Adler, 1987; Loftland and Loftland, 1995; Coy, 2001). I made a conscious effort to manage my image (cf. Sampson and Thomas, 2003) through my appearance, attire, the car I drove to interview sites and the kinds of things I would disclose about myself. For example, I often placed myself in an interview, or spoke of my own father's experiences in the Merchant Navy, thus informally telling the respondent that I understood some of the more basic aspects of a mariners life, if I felt that it could help to build trust and rapport and, moreover, direct the conversation away from the basic descriptive towards the more meaningful 'depth access' (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000:194) I sought. I believe that this had an impact on getting respondents to open up and influenced the types of responses I elicited. Very occasionally, I felt that respondents would like to use me as a conduit to feedback views to management, for example, one coxswain told me: 'They forget that we are volunteers. That's all I'd like to see changed. Their view on us needs a real good looking at. *So you can tell them that*' (John Paul, Coxswain). In these situations I was very careful to emphasize my research ethic of confidentiality and the fact that I was not beholden to management or any other outside group (cf. Tracy, 2004).

It is important to state here that I never represented myself to be something that I was not. Rather, my interaction with the field was somewhat chameleon-like, where I consciously highlighted certain colours to my advantage, and played down others, a 'variety of selves' as Reinharz (1997:3) puts it. For example, in interviews with senior directors of the RNLI I was a

bright, competent, business school graduate, whereas at station level I was a young, interested student, eager to learn. In a sense, the field settings socially constructed my identity (Alvesson, 2003; Mazzei and O'Brien, 2009) as I decided upon and presented status group memberships (McKeganey and Bloor, 1991) which seemed to me to matter most in any given setting. It is also worth mentioning here that I felt (and still feel) a high degree of respect and admiration for the work and workers of the RNLI, particularly the volunteers at local level.

3.2.8 Collecting data[16]

I set out to collect data from diverse and multiple sources in order to glean a more whole and rich view of the practices being enacted. Given a research aim of understanding subjective experiences, I was seeking depth data, and thus I undertook a programme of conducting forty semi-structured interviews of individuals from all levels of the organization[17]. Interviews were semi-structured and open-ended in order to allow respondents to expand on those issues which *they* felt were most significant and meaningful. I began each interview by taking a life history approach, asking participants to trace back their involvement with the RNLI, how and why they had come to join the RNLI and what happened when they joined (cf. Musson, 1998; Kirton, 2006). Interviews lasted from fifteen minutes to three hours, with an average of fifty minutes per interview and took place at local stations (coxswains, launch authorities, LOM's, mechanics

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[16] See data collection schedule in appendix B.

[17] The breakdown is as follows: Waged: 5 directors, 4 senior managers, 3 staff officers, 1 coxswain

Unwaged: 4 coxswains, 4 deputy coxswains, 3 mechanics, 2 deputy mechanics, 9 crew members, 2 lifeboat operation managers, 2 launching authorities, 1 training coordinator.

and crew members) in RNLI headquarters in Poole (directors and senior management of the RNLI) and RNLI divisional base in Dublin (divisional management and staff of the RNLI). All interviews were digitally audio recorded. Prior to interviewing, I acquainted myself with Taylor and Bogdan's (1984) and Kvale's (1996) advice regarding the search for meanings in qualitative interviews.

Interviews were very active – both researcher and researched played a role in the construction of meaning and this framed what would be discussed next. During the interviews, I was attentive to situations where alternative stories were discredited or 'disqualified' (Antaki and Horowitz, 2000: 155) and I probed deeper when I sensed that respondents had a story to tell. Certainly, the interview was not simply a neutral exchange of 'asking questions and getting answers' (Fontana and Frey, 2005: 696; cf. Holstein and Gubrium, 1995; Scheurich, 1995; Atkinson and Silverman, 1997; Hertz, 1997), rather, I felt that the interviews were mediated by our respective and mutual repertoires. For example, when interviewing a mechanic I sensed through his body language that his appointment from unpaid volunteer to paid mechanic had not run smoothly. This hunch gave me impetus to ask more pointed questions about this aspect of his organizational life, which might not have otherwise been asked had I not picked up on non-verbal aspects of the interview. This line of conversation was enabled by qualifying and reassuring my role as an independent researcher guaranteeing anonymity.

Interestingly, almost all of the respondents who were volunteers spoke of their kinship connections to the lifeboat (this aspect is further developed in

section 5.1.1). When asked how they first got into lifeboating, these respondents emphasized how it was a family thing, explaining that their fathers, uncles, grandfathers, and great-grandfathers had been involved, at varying levels from coxswain to shore helper, in the local lifeboat of their day. As in Thornbarrow and Brown's (2009) fascinating ethnography of the Parachute Regiment, many respondents spoke of being 'born into' the lifeboats and being intimately familiar, from an early age of the 'history, traditions, and the mentality' (*Ibid*, p.360) of lifeboat volunteers. All stations had multiple members of the same family involved, and coxswains spoke of the difficult choices which had to be made on nights of wild weather as to whether it was right, morally, to bring two members of the same family out on a dangerous shout should neither of them came home again.

Data were also derived from approximately 850 pages of organizational documents and analyzed for meanings, expressions of power, indications of reflections of reality and managerial perspectives (cf. Forster, 1994; Fairclough, 2003). The most notable of these documents was the *RNLI Divisional Working Practices Handbook (2008)*, the formal set of guidelines issued to each station. In an approach similar to that of Brown (2000, 2004, 2005), I analysed these texts for evidence of moral positioning, to see if the text was intended to have a performative function as authorative for the purposes of maintaining and reproducing legitimacy. The *Divisional Working Practices Handbook* gave insights into the production of meaning, as it was intended to be a reflection of espoused reality by HQ, but as one RNLI manager told me 'you could drive a

horse and cart through it' (Joseph, RNLI Manager). This was an early insight that control structures were looser than documentary evidence might suggest.

Further data were collected through participant observation (undertaking an exercise in the simulator) and non-participant observation (sitting-in on a five day management communications and command training course aimed at station management personnel) at the lifeboat training college at RNLI HQ. These processes provided a micro-ethnographic (Wolcott, 1995) element to the research as I immersed myself in the organization, observed behaviour and asked questions, albeit not for a long time, and was able to balance this with the estrangement 'necessary for revealing what is taken for granted' (Czarniawska, 2008:133). I used these research visits to the lifeboat college as 'an opportunity to see the organization at work and to 'feel' the organization' (Parker, 2000: 238), recording observations in my research diary.

Collecting data from multiple sources amounted to a form of triangulation in the data collection phase in terms of my methods of investigation and sources of data. These multiple perceptions were used to clarify meaning by identifying different ways the case was seen (Silverman, 1993; Flick, 1998) both in my own perceptions and interpretations as a researcher (Alvesson, 2003) and in the communication of my results (Stake, 2005).

3.2.9 Management, analysis and writing up the empirical data

I transcribed each of the forty interviews within two weeks of the interviews occurring so as 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-

familiarize myself with the raw data. Whilst transcribing, I annotated transcripts with any other information which I picked up on my visit regarding 'the feel' of the organization (Parker, 2000: 238) and the emotional tone (Rowlands and Handy, 2012) of the interview, remarks which I had noted in my research diary immediately after interviewing. Transcribing also gave me the opportunity to think about initial codes, identifying the themes that respondents were talking about. After all interviews were transcribed and my field notes and research diary were written up the primary data ran to 514 pages (approximately 250,000 words). It was roughly at this time that I realised that the data did not support the original research proposal (and my original analytic preconceptions) and that members' self and organizational understandings were hugely informed by the dynamics of organizational control and autonomy. In that sense then, regarding the theorization of contestations over control and autonomy which this project has become, the data was coded firstly without trying to fit it into any analytic preconceptions about control and autonomy (see Braun and Clarke, 2006: 83-84). Rather, the research questions evolved through the coding process (Braun and Clarke, 2006). I considered using the software programme N*Vivo, yet after attending the two-day training course I decided that it was not suited to the rich contextual data I had collected[18].

Analysis was an ongoing iterative process of working with the data, seeking patterns and meanings, and tacking back and forth between the data and

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[18] For two main reasons: Firstly, I realized that N*Vivo was very attuned to quantifying qualitative findings as it equates significance by the frequency a particular answer is returned (Crowley et al. (2002) and Welsh (2002) have also argued this point) and secondly the coding of each chunk of data stripped out the all-important context (also found by Prein et al. (1995) and Dohan and Sanchez-Jankowski (1998)). For thorough studies on the merits of using computer-assisted qualitative data analysis programs see Miles and Weitzman (1996) and Atherton and Elsmore (2007).

the literature, paying particular attention to the types of language, narrative and story-telling devices (Czarniawska, 1999; Gabriel, 2000; Watson, 2009), especially moral storytelling (Alvesson, 2003) which respondents used when explaining their life worlds to me. Moral stories were central to respondents' self-understandings of the contestations regarding moral ownership of the lifeboating service and this will become evident throughout the subsequent chapters. I also paid heed to the emotional tone of the transcripts and the ways in which individuals expressed themselves. Throughout the research the primary data collection instrument (semi-structured interview questions) had been updated and renewed so that when a set of assumptions surfaced I could check and cross-check these with other respondents. In this sense, the data collection and analysis were 'irrevocably mated' to each other (Rosen, 1991:1). As I have stated above, analyzing the data had thus been ongoing since the data was in the process of collection (cf. Ezzy, 2002). Once I realized that the data did not support the original research focus of cellularity, coding for (new) themes was originally inductive, in that I did not specifically try and fit the data into a pre-existing coding frame (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Data was read repeatedly, memo'd and annotated, then categorised into clusters, topics, ideas and questions, which were then brought back to the data whilst I simultaneously engaged with the literature on control and autonomy. Engagement with the literature at this juncture enhanced my analytic capability as it sensitized me to the more subtle and nuanced features of the data (Tuckett, 2005).

In this way, the analysis became more deductive as I started generating initial codes for the specific research questions I was concurrently drawing up.

This process in itself was part of the analysis as I was organizing my data into meaningful groups (Tuckett, 2005). Broadly following Braun and Clarke (2006), I then began to collate the numerous codes – coxswain, community, culture, control, autonomy, individual identity, organizational identity, identification, meaning, family, leadership, volunteering, danger – 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. I should emphatically state that my themes did not 'emerge' from the data. *I* played an active role of identifying these themes as of interest. As I thought about and worked with the data, I actively created these links/patterns/themes as *I* understood them to be (cf. Ely et al., 1997) and went back to the data with these 'hunches to see whether they held up' (Hutchinson and Rodman, 1989: 315). As Ely et al. drolly contend:

> The language of themes emerging can be misinterpreted to mean that themes 'reside' in the data, and if we just look hard enough they will 'emerge' like Venus on the half shell. If themes 'reside' anywhere, they reside in our heads from our thinking about our data and creating links as we understand them. (1997: 205)

The iterative process explained above, combined with the reflexive demands brought on by the writing-up process brought to the forefront the four themes of A1 thick volunteering, A2 perilous volunteering, B1 community and B2 offshore, around which I have organized the empirical themes and subsequent

two findings chapters. The four inter-related themes are not of equal weighting, with the subsidiary (2) theme partly explaining the main theme. It is worth underlining the point that all these analytical and theoretical breakthroughs were made throughout the writing-up process. Chapters were drafted, reflected upon, re-drafted, edited, advices sought and incorporated and in some cases re-written. The bibliography did indeed 'take on a nasty and spiteful life of its own' (Grey, 2005: 4). Yet it was only in the course of writing up (March 2012 – June 2013) did the thesis as it now stands take its shape.

3.3 Conclusion

In this chapter I have sought to describe and elucidate some of the complexities and distinctiveness of the RNLI by explaining some of its key features. The institution is in many respects very unusual – it relies on volunteers to endure dangerous and mentally, physically and emotionally sickening situations in order to achieve its goal – and, along with other distinctive qualities – its history, non-governmental status and organizing processes – arguably makes for a 'strategic research arena' (Anteby, 2008:205) in which to examine how work, organizational meaning and identity are controlled when work is unpaid. The thick volunteering identified at the RNLI, coupled with its dangerous nature, opens up a theoretical distinction as it makes for a particularly complicated dynamic.

The early history of the institution, particularly its establishment by a Quaker in 1824, perhaps led to it becoming a certain type of value-driven organization, concerned with Quaker values such as moral voice, community

mindedness, volunteerism and social responsibility. No doubt its dominant ideology was reinforced as a result of its autonomous non-state, charitable status. Reflecting back on Windsor's view that Quaker-established organizations espoused a 'fatherly benevolence predicated on a view that *they* knew what was right and good for people' (Windsor, 1980: 3, emphasis added) could well explain some of the traces of the early history which clearly remain to this day. Part of the current ongoing dynamic between HQ and local stations regarding control and autonomy is a constant interplay of 'who is the rightful expert?' and 'who has the right to speak for what and for whom?', questions that, in all probability, dominated discussions within the early independent stations of the early eighteenth century. Throughout the history of the RNLI, the embedding process of Royal Navy personnel and procedures is also evident, adding an element of culture-in-structure to the organization. Typical aspects of hierarchical cultural control are manifest throughout the modern organization in the form of the official vision and values statement and the volunteer commitment policy. I have presented these and noted how they must be treated with a degree of circumspection because, amongst other things, management-espoused values are not necessarily shared by all organization members.

The second part of this chapter presented the methodological aspects of my empirical research at the RNLI. This qualitative research followed an interpretive social constructionist perspective with the aim of *Verstehen* (Weber, 1946), that is, an in-depth understanding of the meaning of the concept for those involved. Selection of research sites was guided by a theoretical sample (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Eisenhardt, 1989) which I drew up in order to create better

possibilities for capturing any regional specificities; but I must stress that I do not seek or claim generalizability on the basis of this sample, which may or may not have been representative. Primary data collection was by semi-structured interviews, through participant observation and sitting-in as an observer on a five day training course aimed at station leaders. Analysis of the data broadly followed Braun and Clarke (2006), and I played an active role in identifying the themes of thick volunteering, perilous volunteering, community and offshore, the first two of which are presented as findings in the next chapter.

'Commitment is an act, not a word'
(John Paul Sartre 1905-1980)

CHAPTER 4: THE INTERPLAY OF THICK VOLUNTEERING AND PERIL IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF MEANING AT THE RNLI

4.1 Introduction

In the next two chapters I will present the findings of this qualitative case study of the RNLI. To analyse the dynamic which I empirically observed in the RNLI, I employ four interrelated themes, namely; (A1) Thick volunteering, (A2) Perilous Volunteering, (B1) Community, and (B2) Offshore. The themes themselves are also interlinked, with the second theme partly explaining the first. By this I mean that 'perilous volunteering' helps to explain the phenomena of 'thick volunteering', and the categories grouped in the theme of 'offshore' add explanatory power to the analytic category of 'community'. Loosely speaking, the themes of thick volunteering and perilous volunteering are most related to chapter two; organizational control and autonomy in voluntary settings, and the themes of community and offshore are most linked to chapter one; meaning and organizational identity in voluntary settings, although there is a degree of necessary overlap. The data are presented with respect to the themes. This chapter describes the findings under the themes thick volunteering and perilous volunteering, and chapter five proceeds to describe the findings under the community and offshore themes.

4.2 Theme A1: Thick Volunteering

The data collected was replete with the sense that, emphatically, the RNLI was a *voluntary* organization, however contested and ambiguous this may be in practical terms. Here, I will use the analytical term 'thick volunteering' as introduced in chapter one as a top-level theme to explain the dynamics of control and autonomy within the organization. In their rhetoric and immortalized in their publicity material, directors, paid management and volunteers alike were at pains to express the RNLI's proud heritage[1] of volunteerism and the organization's continued espoused volunteer ethos. However, the meaning of volunteerism, presented here as a key value of this normative organization, was a contested and negotiated narrative rather than a grounded empirical fact. As I will show, 'thick volunteering' partly explains these contestations. Within the RNLI, volunteerism was a key indicator of actors' status and as such, a distinctive faultline ran through the organization with paid staff on one side and volunteers on the other:

> Funnily enough they treat us [volunteers] different to the couple of employees here [paid mechanics]. The employees are very much employees, and get treated like that. And they [RNLI Management] are trying to deal with us completely different…well, they are strict with us but there is more respect, more…it's very much a boss-employee relationship between the mechanic and the inspectors. He does get a bollocking, he does get snotty emails, we don't. (Luke, Crew Member)

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[1] Indeed the 'Heritage Trust' a subsidiary charity of the RNLI was established in 2004 to 'communicate and celebrate the RNLI's common humanity and constant voluntary service saving lives at sea since 1824' (RNLI Heritage Trust, 2013).

Contested beliefs at the RNLI centred on four critical narrative claims: (1) Who controls this organization? (2) Who is trying to speak for whom and for what? (3) Who is the legitimate rightful expert? And (4) who owns this lifeboat? This ongoing dialogue was compounded by the experienced in-group / out-group (Kramer, 1993) differentiation between station volunteers and HQ paid workers. Unlike other empirical research which finds contestations arising due to paid staff feeling threatened by volunteers (McCurley and Lynch, 1997; Kreutzer and Jäger, 2011), in this case contestations mainly arose due to competing interpretations of what it *meant* to be a volunteer. Tensions gravitated around moral claims augmented by the dangerous work environment. The following three sections will elucidate this theme further.

4.2.1 Meanings of thick volunteering

One ironic finding of the study was that the kinds of things that in 'normal' organizations management seek to inculculate through a system of normative control (such as adherence and commitment to the organizationally sanctioned values) were already well-established at station level. Culture management is almost always theorized as building high commitment to the organization (Hales, 1993; Casey 1995), but there can be no doubt that strong commitment already existed to this very time-consuming work. Operational volunteers had to reside within a defined radius of the station[2] and wear pagers at all times. Their lives were confined by drink-driving laws and ensuring that adequate cover was always maintained so that calls for help twenty-four hours a day, seven days a

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[2] This varies from station to station and is decided by considering a combination of availability of volunteers, projected traffic and travel time to the station.

week, 365 days a year could be responded to. Volunteer respondents spoke forcefully of being incredibly proud of their stations and their teams, and the immense level of personal satisfaction, confidence in their own abilities and positive self-development they gained from being part of a local station. Volunteering was explained as something that was passionately in the heart, something that was incredibly deep and meaningful that they held a great desire to do, and was prioritized as a salient role in life, particularly after witnessing various tragedies unfold over the years:

Respondent: The lifeboat is first really, in front of [paid] work and everything. That's the bottom line of it… the lifeboat comes first…

Me: How did it become so powerful in your life?

Respondent: Maybe because we are so close to the sea here and we see so many tragedies over the years, I remember when I was a young chap there were five friends of mine drowned. And maybe that got us all together, when I seen what the [lifeboat] lads were doing at that time, I was only seventeen years of age at the time and I looked at it and I thought these lads are doing it for nothing and it just clicked home with me, ever since then it has just been top of my agenda really. Saturday night if I was going out with the wife or family and the pager would go, they are left. It's no big deal, we would all do it, it's not just me it's a thing that you inherit. (Ben, Station Chairman)

The meaning and significance attached, both cognitively and affectively, to their volunteering activities led to individuals' understanding volunteering as identity work or a 'narrative of the self' (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002:627) which deeply informed volunteer's self-understandings about the kind of person they were (Watson, 1994a) a topic I will explore in depth in the next chapter. Volunteering was experienced as a 'powerful framing function' (Kornberger and Brown, 2007: 505) in the construction of the self that influenced self-perception and behavioural patterns. The 'thickness' of this volunteering was indicated in the way that volunteers took genuine and sincere *ownership* of their role, the lifeboat and the service the local station provided. Many participants described how their lives revolved around volunteering for the RNLI, a symptom of the disciplinary power of commitment to the role:

Me: What does being in the RNLI mean to you?

Respondent: Oh Jesus sure I suppose it's been a big part of my life really, you know, its bred into you. Its part of what you are and what you do. You'd revolve a lot around it, even though you're not paid full-time to be here it's always on your mind if you're going anywhere or doing anything. (Christy, Coxswain)

The thick volunteering which I observed at the RNLI was perhaps partly a by-product of the intricate recruitment and socialization policies enacted at local level. On application to become a volunteer, informal inquires were made around the locality by core members of the station such as coxswains, mechanics and

'old-timers' in order to ascertain the character of the applicant. Reputations were checked and selection was tightly controlled – not everyone was considered to be a suitable volunteer. Tightly controlling inputs by selecting volunteers for perceived values compatibility is a classic indication of reliance on community mechanisms (Adler et al., 2008; cf. Ouchi, 1978; Snell, 1992; Chenhall, 2003), a point which will be discussed in much greater detail in the next chapter. Furthermore, just giving up time for free was not enough. Probationer volunteers had to prove their commitment and dedication and conform to the collective norms at station level. In this way, local stations socialized and controlled their members with 'symbolic rewards such as prestige or acceptance' (Lois, 1999: 117). The following passage succinctly epitomizes the expectations volunteers had of themselves and each other:

Well I think it's the sense of purpose and the dedication that everybody has to have, I mean when we start young guys here we dish the dirt on them, they are down there cleaning the boat for six months before they go to sea, and the whole idea behind that is we don't want people who are here just to have an RNLI badge, I mean to get the chicks, or the guys if they are ladies, we don't want those people. Fine if they want to come in and go out, we won't keep them too long! But, we really don't want them. We want people who are going to be dedicated. (Charlie, Lifeboat Operations Manager)

Once an individual was fully accepted as a volunteer and socialized through local training and a heedful emphasis on the norms and values of the station, collective relations were described as a 'brotherhood' and a 'family', such was the ethos of teamwork and involvement. At local level, volunteers were actively encouraged to be deeply involved, invested and take ownership of their part of the RNLI by accepting even the most mundane of work tasks, taking part in regular training exercises and 'bringing along' weaker members of the team. Coupled with the dangerous work environment[3] in which these 'crucial life-death functions' (Van Maanen, 1976: 87) were performed, strong emphasis was placed on values, beliefs and norms that engendered high levels of interpersonal solidarity (cf. Lois, 1999). The affective commitment attached to volunteering was in itself controlling, as thoughts, feelings and actions were disciplined by volunteers' commitment to the boat, the station and each other. Solidarity did not just begin and end at local station level, but was also evident across stations, as demonstrated in this moving account from a coxswain of twenty-three years service:

> It's more than a bond of necessity, more so that they [stations] have the same understanding of each other and what each other does to such a level that it becomes more family than social. We know exactly what the lads in Clifden[4] do or go through on a shout. They know what we go through. And I remember on one occasion when we were coming back

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[3] This related theme will be discussed at greater length later in this chapter.
[4] This and all place names and personal names except Poole and Dublin have been changed to protect anonymity.

from Poole, Ricky in Fenit… I said to him 'we'll get home before you' and there was this kind of race [by lifeboat] from Poole to where we are or Poole to Fenit. So I arrived home at twelve at night and I rang Ricky and I says 'where are you?' he said 'I am out on a shout', 'out on a shout?' I say, 'yes' he says 'three of my cousins are lost'. I said ' I am on my way', and I turned the car around and told my wife where I was going and I headed for Fenit [6 hours away by car] and I took him off that boat and told him to go ashore, I am taking over. He could not possibly be out there searching for his cousins. And I was there for a whole week until all the bodies was got. And crews came from that station; crews came from the Aran Islands, Valentia, Courtmacsherry just because the cousins were lost. That's a bond. That's more than a job, that's more than the social. That's a bond. You do that and you don't even think about it, that's what they [we] do. (Séan, Coxswain)

Following from the involved way Séan dealt with that tragic situation, it was obvious that the personal subjective experience of volunteering was deeply meaningful in the hearts and minds of the volunteers of the RNLI. Sincerely held convictions of commitment, investment and involvement connected to their volunteering activities indicated a 'thick volunteering' whereby volunteers attached such cognitive and affective ownership towards their role that it became part of the psychological owner's self-concept and thus identity. The next section explores how this attachment played out when the meaning of volunteerism was contested.

4.2.2 Contested discourses of volunteerism

Throughout the data collection and analysis process, it became clear that two modes of organization (broadly running along the lines of Zimmecks (2001) model presented in chapter two, table 2.1) could be inductively theorized. RNLI management mode advocated running the RNLI as a business: 'As far as I'm concerned it [the RNLI] is a business, because I am here with a commercial background as well as a voluntary background' (Steven, RNLI Manager), whereas the local stations' ideological platform revolved around the 'family' of volunteers. What was at stake here was what being a volunteer *meant* in working terms within the RNLI. Who were the rightful experts and owners of the service? Or in other words, as ownership confers assumed control (Pierce et al., 2001) which groups' worldview should be accorded privilege? Throughout their dialogue and interaction with volunteers, RNLI management attempted to use culture to frame the subjectivity of volunteers. Cultural artefacts such as the impressive Lifeboat Training College at Poole signified power architecturally. Uniforms and flags, although standard-issue at HQ, were customized at local stations, often giving precedence to the local name over the generic RNLI branding. In an interesting twist, one director held the view that as localized branding increased localized ownership this was to be encouraged for fundraising reasons. Medals and vellums presented as awards for bravery were coveted, highly prestigious and took pride of place hung in lifeboat stations, suggesting a real symbolic value attached to their attainment. As I set out in the previous chapter, a vision and values statement and the use of 'the volunteer commitment' explicitly advocated the espoused norms and beliefs. The

ubiquitous RNLI sponsored training programmes were aimed, in obvious respects, to impart superior technical knowledge, but also in less obvious and more nuanced ways 'not just to train them but to make them better human beings as well' (Charlie, Lifeboat Operations Manager) under the assumption that it was, naturally, management who decided how 'better human beings' behaved.

HQ's attempt at culture management was not without local resistance. Stations strove to maintain local beliefs and norms regarding autonomy and to uphold their own frames shaping values and basic assumptions. The ongoing negotiation of reality led to tensions as each group sought to interpret who was trying to speak for what and for whom. Similar to Zimmeck's (2001) findings presented in chapter two, two play-outs of legitimacy, the business model and the volunteerism model, were evident. The business model privileged a bureaucratic structure, exuded an ethos often described as militaristic 'command and control' and to an extent relied on the threat of control techniques of sequestration. HQ was highly concerned with risk management and duty of care (for example, corporate manslaughter legislation was prominently displayed on a notice board in one senior manager's office), and believed that HQ was the rightful and legitimate experts with regards to the provision of the service:

We control them [the volunteers], I'm fine with the word control as long as its not taken to the Nth degree…well there is a balance to be struck isn't there? But we control them in the sense that if you want to do this job, this volunteer role, you have to do it *on our terms*. And in that respect, we are going to control you in what you do. You can't just

go out there at sea and do what you want. You have to follow the rules and the structure, and if you don't then we will, depending on the seriousness of what you haven't or have done, we will take that role away from you. We will sack you. (Dennis, RNLI Senior Manager)

The rational-legal foundations of HQ's authority were discursively mobilized by the senior manager above who drew on the logic of instilling trust and predictability into organizational routines in order to guide actions, thoughts and feelings (Grey and Garsten, 2001). To this end, HQ developed an elaborate system of standardized bureaucratic controls in the form of standard operating procedures (SOPs) as a way of codifying expert knowledge. SOPs formed the basis of almost all training programs but their use was not without controversy as I will later show.

Conversely, the volunteer identity emphasised the shared norms of the family, the team, the local maritime expertise learned and consolidated over many years and the higher moral ground emanating from commitment to danger for no pay. Volunteering, this respondent argued, should not only shape the individual's identity, but also the organization's identity:

I don't think Poole understand what it is we do here and I think that's a good point to pick up on because I think very strongly on this…They [HQ] don't really realize what effort goes into it at local level. And I'm talking about every station, I'm not only talking about ours, I'm talking about in general. If they knew what time people were putting into it,

they would see it in a different light. I don't know why they can't see it because the returns of service every year tells them what you do in a station, you have to record everything you know…we are volunteers, we get nothing and we don't want nothing [sic] for it, we do it because we love what we do…them people [HQ] would be on serious money and they come down once in a blue moon and they have a whole lot of rules for us… you couldn't …it's local knowledge, you have to do what you think [is right] on the night, move on, get into it, get the job done. (Ben, Station Chairman)

To the respondent above, being at the 'sharp end' of the rescue served to back the credibility of his argument. The tensions in the relationship pivoted not only on the mechanisms of control, for example the aforementioned ubiquitous SOPs which governed what and how things should be done, but also the management of control – in this emotionally charged dangerous setting who had the right to tell who what to do and how to do it? The moral universe (Gupta, 1995, 2005; Jakimow, 2010) of the following volunteer actor was evident as he (comically) drew on his volunteer philosophy to defend and justify his counterpoint to the managerial rhetoric:

For me, ah it's very much for the [local] lifeboat. Oh absolutely yeah. I would not… I …I would cut me left testicle off, I absolutely could not…they're a horrible shower! …they're gone so corporate now…they've lost the personal touch, you know…it's a different

philosophy. We are volunteers …these guys are professional, that's their job and they get paid to do it, so we both have different interests in the organization…see the other thing is we do this because we like it. And you couldn't harness that sort of enthusiasm by paying people. Because you couldn't, you couldn't…there isn't an amount of money, if you wanted me to do this for money you would get me for all the wrong reasons… and you wouldn't get the enthusiasm that a volunteer would give. Because they want to be here. (Frank, Second Coxswain)

In the minds and hearts of volunteers, thick volunteering was indeed a cultural root metaphor. It was deeply embedded into the fabric of what the organization stood for (Smircich, 1983). In this meaning, volunteering signified an ownership of the organization and an assumed rightful and legitimate control of its local rescue activities. Conversely, volunteers interpreted HQ's understanding of volunteerism as something the organization 'had', that is, a set of 'human resources' at *their* disposal, as evidenced by this response: 'They forget that we are volunteers. That's all I'd like to see changed. Their view on us needs a real good looking at' (John Paul, Coxswain).

The next section will delve empirically deeper into these dynamics by considering how discourses of management, expertise, power and ownership were used in order to accomplish control. Particularly in this context of thick volunteering, the relations of power were not unilateral, and the following section pays specific attention to nuanced counter-discourses, moral challenges and resistance.

4.2.3 Manifestations and dynamics of control and autonomy in the context of thick volunteerism, or, 'who owns and controls this lifeboat?'

One fascinating insight facilitated by the study of this particular empirical setting unhampered as it was by the inequalities inherent in typical waged relationships, was the constantly negotiated realities regarding the issues of who was managing who and who was in control. The data I collected, imbued with meaning for respondents, passionate about *their* lifeboat service, highlighted a complex, ongoing dynamic. In its most basic variant this dynamic took the form of contestations over legitimate ownership of, in particular, the lifeboat station and its boat, played out between volunteer crews and HQ. For example, the boat was legally owned by the RNLI but was to a great extent seen by the volunteer crew as 'belonging' to them, and in a more diffuse sense to the local community both past and present[5]. This dynamic was crucially about the meaning of the boat and lifesaving service for different actors, meanings which had deep consequences for the nature of organizing (Gergen et al., 2004) for example:

> [Volunteers] view that lifeboat as their boat, as far as they are concerned it's 'our' lifeboat. They talk about our lifeboat not RNLI lifeboat. RNLI in Poole is alien to the community here, in the sense of 'that's our lifeboat'. So it is something that was given to them and they have taken ownership of it. (Seán, Coxswain)

Whilst RNLI HQ brought a different frame of reference to the situation:

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[5] I will explore this in much greater detail in the next chapter.

Because we are providing the basic equipment, the basic training, the infrastructure and the maintenance, it gives us a duty of care over those people and so we sign up into the [local] organisation and say 'if you want to, as part of the community, if you want to deliver this life saving service, we will really help you to do that, but you are going to have to do it *on the institutions terms* because we reckon we can look after you better than if you were just doing it in an ad-hoc way'. (Dennis, RNLI Senior Manager)

Contrary to Farmer and Fedor (2001), volunteers were also coercively controlled by their attachment to the organization which, in turn, disciplined them. The experienced threat of punishment was clear in this account of HQ-Station relations:

If you have a catastrophic fuck up in the morning, if you have followed procedures the institution will back you. But if you haven't followed procedures and you have a catastrophic fuck up the institution will walk away and hang you out to dry. (Conor, Mechanic)

Whereas there is no question that volunteers were in control of the rescue situation on a 'shout'[6], different realities were fashioned which constantly questioned the meaning of the basic assumptions underlying the norms of the organisation. Realities in the RNLI were socially constructed by the interactions

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[6] Chapter five will explore this in much greater detail.

of members. Within the station-HQ relationship, culture had as much potential to create conflict as it did to create harmony (cf. Grey, 2012). Volunteering in this context was very much linked with the mobilization of moral arguments which involved 'concerns about the social position of the self (and others) including issues of rights, duties, obligations, responsibility and potential blame' (Whittle and Mueller, 2012: 114; cf. Harré and Van Langenhove, 1999; Van Langenhove and Harré, 1999). As I will explain in greater depth in chapter six, this moral legitimacy became the focus of meaning-making and manifested as a form of individual and collective resistance against the managerial agenda. As they were unwaged, volunteers' thought processes were unhampered by the typical economic reasons which maintain retention and a submittal to managerial control in economic employment relationships. Indeed those engaged in thick volunteering sought to negate the bureaucratic and coercive tendencies of HQ, challenged the ways these forms of control draw on discourses of managerial expertise, and actively sought autonomy in their role and the functions of the local station:

> [RNLI management] can't sack me, you know, they can't do anything to me. They don't scare me, so no matter who they are it won't intimidate me. Because I say 'fuck you, you can say what you like to me', because they've no…they've no…I'm in a very strong position, because they need me more than I need them. And there's nobody in it [HQ] can intimidate me in that regard, because they have no *authority* over me, effectively. I'm a volunteer they can't sack me. They can

come down and ask me to leave if they want, that would not be in their interests either. In saying that too, I don't do anything that warrants [expulsion] …but I think that it's a great position of power for us. So long as you can realise that and you kind of say 'well they have to be really nice to me', you know… In saying that, in saying that, the equipment supplied the boats they give, the survival equipment and the training is second-to-none. So while I'm giving out about them, the fact that they can provide this stuff probably turns them into the arseholes that they are!... Yeah, but you know what I'm saying…it's really a double edged thing. (Frank, Second Coxswain)

This passionate assertion of the wilful autonomy of volunteers, whilst recognised to an extent at the highest echelons of management was, perplexingly, met with a complacent attitude which completely assumed the dominance of managerial privilege over control. In other words, HQ assumed that *they* had a control that the volunteers themselves did not recognise:

The policy comes from here, so does the training, the requirements, the equipment required, the HR backup, the finance backup all this is central and undoubtedly I think that's where the control is. I suppose there's a view that actually without the volunteer, if the volunteers decided not to be controlled that would give us a major problem. So they have a…I suppose whilst they are happy to be controlled it's not a problem. (Andrew, RNLI Director)

The above construction of reality tended to be interpreted by volunteers as arrogance on high which was also frequently reported by participants at all levels of the organization. The residual effects of the RNLI employing 'mostly retired Royal Navy officers' (Frank, Second Coxswain) (cf. chapter three) was seen as to blame for the command and control ethos of HQ. Probably this was also informed by the economics of the situation. Although local stations ran a local fundraising guild, there was widespread acknowledgement that the large sums of money it takes to run a lifeboat[7] could never be raised locally, and so there was awareness on both sides that local stations had no alternative but to accept funds from central fundraising. Volunteers were, in effect, economically controlled by their requirement for expensive resources. Accepting finances, however, did not equate to unquestioningly accepting managerially espoused methods of work, standardized control and acculturation, as the bi-annual inspection of stations by RNLI management interestingly showed. Close analysis of the following passage from a colourful volunteer coxswain led to a central issue here: who was controlling whom?

Respondent: They [RNLI HQ] do it good, there are a few things [in] their rules and regulations [that] are a load of shite, it can't be done that way…still we usually just do it our way and then when the inspector comes down go back to the way the book is, then we go back for six months doing our own way. I think every station does it. And all our bits and pieces that we are not meant to have in the station; everything

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[7] The larger boats cost STG£3M to design and build. The overall service costs £385,000 per day to run (RNLI Annual Report and Accounts, 2011).

gets hid away into the boots of cars and gone for three days every six months. They [the inspectors] know it…

Me: Like what?

Respondent: Like our own stretchers and own tow ropes that we use which the RNLI doesn't issue you with. They only have a big tow rope, so for a small boat you cant tie a small boat up with it. Every station has their own small personal kit, and then that just goes missing for a few days…

Me: And you think they know that?

Respondent: Yes they do, they give you warnings get your stuff [out]! They [RNLI inspectors] all know who has what

Me: And would they turn a blind eye to it?

Respondent: They just tell you 'don't let it be there when I come down', that kind of way. Its like our towing bridle that we have been using, they know that it's better than their one, and now they have come back and said that our one is better than theirs and they took photographs of it working and I think now it's in the process of getting redesigned and sending it out to the other stations. But that's the RNLI though, just steamroll in and say 'we're using that rope', they don't go around to the Tyne (particular type of lifeboat) stations and say 'what do you use?' they say 'there's a piece of rope and you have to use that'.

(Daragh, Coxswain)

Whilst providing an almost textbook example of the dysfunctions of standardized bureaucracy, this respondent also proudly asserted the superior knowledge regime which resided in his local lifeboat station. The obvious resistance to managerial control not only proved the experienced coercive tendencies (if they thought they would not be punished, the local station would not go to the effort of deliberately hiding their personal kit), but also highlighted a dynamic akin to the factory games analysed by Roy (1953) and Burawoy (1985) in the pre-visit negotiation with RNLI management. By passing the word 'don't let it be there when I come down', RNLI inspectors revealed their hand on how loose their overall grip of control actually was. In an obvious respect, this turned the ritual of inspection into a two way process. Although volunteers' voice may have been formally silent, the informal 'heads up' was explained as a way of demonstrating mutual respect in an effort consciously designed not to proverbially 'rock the boat':

> Respondent: I suppose if [the operations director] came to our station he would probably blow his top, because it wouldn't be done by the green book[8]. We do it our own way
>
> Me: When the inspector comes down to do his six-monthly inspection what way do you do it then?
>
> Respondent: We do it his way then! We do it his way then!

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[8] Colloquial term for the divisional working practices handbook.

Me: Somebody in a lifeboat station told me that when they know the inspector is coming down there is boots of cars filled up with stuff, hidden in attics…

Respondent: You shine the boat up and you do everything first class by the book, and then when he goes you do everything back to normality again…but by saying that it's good that they are coming down because it keeps everybody on their toes. Everybody says 'here's the fecking inspector coming'…we do dread it even though we are volunteers and we can tell him to get lost, but we won't do that. So we do have it right for him. And of course they have responsibility and they have to come down and show their responsibility because that's their job, so they have to do their job as well as we have to do our job, so we have to respect that, you know what I mean. (Ben, Station Chairman)

There were obvious limits to volunteer tolerance of managerial controls and these were clearly expressed in the resistance evidenced above. As a specific technique through which control was mobilized, management's inspection was considerably disempowered by not only the forewarning given by the inspector but also by the station's social consensus of expert knowledge and rightful autonomy. The above response brings to mind direct parallels with Ogbonna and Wilkinson's (1988, 2003) research on supermarket staff who were encouraged, acculturated even, to act friendly and smile at customers in order to create an impression of customer service. Staff 'smiled but did not mean it' (Grey, 2005:72, cf. Ogbonna and Wilkinson, 1988), superficially conforming to the

culture management techniques which, incidentally, were reinforced by surveillance such as CCTV and mystery shoppers – akin to the panoptic SAP software system which had to be updated daily at stations and electronically conveyed all data (launches, personnel, training, parts, engine hours etc.) back to HQ[9]. The 'resigned behavioural compliance' (Ogbonna and Wilkinson, 2003: 1152) evident in Ben's response was certainly not the same as the deeply held conviction which bonded volunteers to the local station and to each other. Despite the best efforts of RNLI management to 'intervene in and regulate being' (Grey, 2005: 68) through incessant training and development programs designed not only to impart technical knowledge but also to shape the internal worlds of volunteers (Willmott, 1993) and turn them into 'better human beings', volunteer identification steadfastly remained with the norms and tacit frames which shaped the values of their local station. As I will now explain, this led to an inherent paradox in thick volunteering.

By definition, volunteers join organizations of their own volition, and research consistently finds that freely-chosen behaviours are highly committing (Pratt, 2000: 474, cf. Kiesler, 1971; Salancik, 1977). Particularly in the context of normative organizations, people volunteer as an opportunity to live their values. They join organizations whose values they feel connected to, because they seek, on a moral imperative, to do something good, and theoretically, selflessly work towards achieving organizational goals. The paradox here is that at no stage was volunteering experienced as 'I do what I like'. On the contrary, volunteers were often subjected to a version of management the same as within a

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[9] In an interesting development, RNLI management are conducting trials with helmet-mounted cameras at some stations.

paying employment relationship. So whilst on the one hand, volunteering is supposedly 'about creativity, freedom of action and choice' (Kreutzer and Jager, 2011: 654), on the other, volunteers had to submit to the collective will, surrender some individual and station autonomy and allow themselves to be controlled by RNLI management. In this way, despite the absence of an economic relationship, the managerial control agenda, albeit in slightly different forms than within the traditional waged relationship, is inherent in thick volunteering. Indeed, I should think that the immense levels of commitment which were observed at the RNLI would be the envy of organizational managers!

At the local stations of the RNLI it was the commitment to the 'family', driven by emotional proximity to the cause (in which danger played a meaningful role), which most guided and regulated volunteers' actions, thoughts and behaviours. By definition, volunteers joined the organization and carry out the volunteer role of their own free will, but over time they became (self) disciplined by their commitment to each other. Not even the most persistent of culture management programs, for example management's use of sophisticated narrative in the volunteer commitment policy, could dilute volunteers' dominant, enduring primary commitment – identification steadfastly remained with each other and the local station:

You are going to hear some savagely critical comments about the lifeboat [RNLI management], and I hear them here, there is people come to me and I could say to them, 'if you are feeling that way, what

are you doing here?' They say 'because I want to, I want to go out on that boat and I want to help people', and I say 'so there is an organization that is providing you with that boat and all that equipment, do you not see that?' And they say 'no no [they're] fucking clowns!' So to answer your question what keeps it together? I don't know! I really don't. And you'll find these views all over the place, there is people who could take you off at the knees pretty quickly, but when the pager goes off at three o' clock on a shitty morning they will be the first ones out there [on that lifeboat]. (Finn, Lifeboat Operations Manager)

In my analysis, this is something to do with the social reality that what it meant to be engaged in thick volunteering bestowed something that money could not buy – higher moral ground. Thick volunteering was greatly influenced by historical, traditional, kinship and contextual (dangerous working environment) factors. Historically, as I have already stated, many of the lifeboat stations were independent and their early history left trace elements which influence the present. Tradition was woven over time into the story of local stations via rituals, storytelling (Gabriel, 1991a, 1991b) and the acceptance of particular narratives over others, thus becoming productive, generative mechanisms which shaped and created realities rather than just reflecting them (Gupta, 2005). Together with the family bonds of kinship, which I will explain in depth in the next chapter, and the dangerous working environment, these historical and traditional factors helped to explain why those engaged in thick volunteering felt and behaved as they did.

Along with these features, an aspect which made this case so unusual is that because the lifeboat was completely fire-walled from RNLI management when it was at sea, autonomy was amplified:

You are supposed to adhere to their guidelines but no, when you are out you are in total control, you may be guided by them but we just do our own thing when we are out…well they *can't get at you* when you are out there. You are completely isolated from them when you are at sea. (John Paul, Coxswain)

Self-management at the 'sharp end' where the RNLI could not 'get at' the crew (which will be discussed in depth in the next chapter), the free donation of time, energy and in many cases money (for example, mobile telephone bills are not covered by the institution), putting oneself in the line of danger, and the deeply held traditional socio-ideological beliefs of local autonomy were translated in this case as negation structures enacted by volunteers to claim a deeper meaning of the lifeboat and the service it provided. In an endless cycle of mutual interaction thick volunteering and the sense of ownership of the lifeboat service bound volunteers to their role and to each other. The narratives of legitimate autonomy which volunteers relayed were also productive, in that they not only reflected volunteers understandings, but also shaped them (Gupta, 2005). What was most interesting in the accounts of volunteers was the undeniable interpretation that at the core of volunteers' selfhood and identity, defining their meaning and purpose (Gabriel, 1999: 180) was the *moral* ownership of the

lifeboat and the service it provided. To those engaged in thick volunteering, the lifeboat was not just 'what we do', it was emphatically 'who we are'. The nuances of this case study are intensely evident in the case of the mechanic, who, as a paid worker of the institution for forty hours of the week and a volunteer at all other times, was the embodiment of the dual instantiation of organization, the centre of the knot, deeply rooted in double ownership:

> I am here because I want to be here. It's not just a job, it's not just a job. To take on the role of mechanic or [paid] coxswain in a station at a local level requires more passion than the average day job because there is a lot more involved than in the average day job. In the average day job you do nine to five, five o'clock finish you switch off and move on to your own life. The institution's job at a local level, you don't switch off you are always a full time mechanic. Its twenty-four seven, seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day and there is no holidays…you get your annual leave, but I mean I still work Christmas day I work New Years day I work Stephens's day and I won't ask anybody to come in and do my job on their holidays so no you are never switched off, you are never switched off… I am the only paid hand here, but I consider myself paid from nine to five and after that, although I am requested to be on call twenty-four seven, I consider [myself] after five o'clock to be a volunteer. (Conor, Mechanic)

Within this passage, not only did the mechanic impart deep insight into what informed his self and organizational understandings, he also, knowingly or

unknowingly, used classic elements of rhetoric (cf. Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991) to convince me, his audience, of his claims. His claim to credibility, or ethos stemmed from his strong work ethic and his volunteer status all the hours outside nine to five. Pathos, appealing to the audience's emotions came through as he spoke of his passion for a work that is 'not just a job'. The cogent argument and evidence to back up his statement came in the rhetoric of what one must sacrifice to hold the position of station mechanic – work through Christmas when everyone else is at home with their families and to never allow ones self to switch off. In other words, this respondent subtly communicated 'although I am paid, actually I do have moral ground'.

4.2.4 Conclusion of theme A1

I developed the theme of thick volunteering in order to describe and elucidate some of the key narratives which were used by volunteers in order to claim ownership of the lifeboat and the service it provided. Thick volunteering was greatly informed by the context of the situation and the life stories (cf. Giddens, 1991; McAdams, 2006b) of those involved; the ways they became members of the organization, their immense commitment to it and each other, their family history intertwined with the local lifeboat, and the emotionally framed meanings that propelled volunteers to remain working in a dangerous, time-consuming environment without promise of pay. This volunteerism identity and discourse emphasized the shared norms of the family, the team, the local maritime expertise consolidated over many years and the resultant higher moral ground claimed by virtue of commitment to danger for no pay. It is my thesis that

volunteers experienced such a sense of ownership (Weil, 1952; Sartre, 1969; Pierce et al., 2001) and affective commitment (Meyer at al., 2002) towards their role and the voluntary organization that this target became part of their identity. The example of the inspection shows how volunteers pushed against managerial prerogative and instead asserted their inherent autonomy as unpaid, and somewhat uncontrollable, workers. Their constructions of reality pivoted on their status as the most involved, rightful owners of the service. The 'conversational storytelling' (Mandelbaum, 1993: 247) evident in respondents' accounts is symbolic of the competing interpretations of the interactive arena of organizing within the RNLI.

By paying close attention to the kinds of stories that respondents divulged and the 'discursive devices' (Edwards and Potter, 1992: 68; Mueller and Whittle, 2011) which volunteers used to tell them, it became apparent that storytelling had a role in 'constructing the morality of the characters involved' (Whittle and Mueller, 2012: 112), particularly with regards to the contested discourses of volunteerism and business within the RNLI. Morality here was framed in terms of who could legitimately be considered the owners of the lifeboat and service, and by extension who could rightfully speak for what and for whom, and could lay claims to control the organization.

Thick volunteering has partly explained some of the significant dynamics at play within the HQ-local station relationship. One particular aspect of thick volunteering arose due to the dangerous and risky work environment encircling the enactment of the service. Theme A2, Perilous Volunteering, illuminates this theory and helps to further explain the responses of my participants.

4.3 Theme A2: Perilous Volunteering

'You go out [to sea] and you are risking your life but at the same time you are happy at it' (Peter, Second Coxswain)

In a very real and concrete way, perilous volunteering, the sub-theme of thick volunteering, helps to explain the 'thickness' of thick volunteering. To be clear what I am saying here is that whilst not all thick volunteering is perilous or dangerous, but if perilous, it is especially thick. Indeed, not all dangerous work is voluntary, but when it is voluntary, it acquires a particular dynamic. This section seeks to explain features of that dynamic.

Operational volunteers risked their lives to live the values of lifeboating. Since the institution's foundation, 778 RNLI members have lost their lives in the service of helping others at sea. In the previous chapter (section 3.1.5) I outlined why the RNLI is such an unusual organization. The actualities of the physical working environment – wind, waves, swells, tides, darkness, rain, thunder, lightning, seasickness etc[10] – contributed immensely to this unusualness and in my opinion, indubitably marked out the work of the RNLI as altogether different to that of other organizations, particularly as its front-line operators are unpaid.

4.3.1 Perilous volunteering

The study of organizations is quite peculiar. In order to render intelligible something which is very complex – the messy and fluid nature of organizing – theorists must generally rely on abstract notions (cf. Grey, 2012). No such

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[10] Granted, not all rescues take place in these most severe conditions but All Weather Lifeboats must be prepared for and occasionally endure them.

abstractions were required here. Danger and risk were very much a way of life for the operational volunteers of the RNLI, both in the life-and-death situations encountered on rescue missions and via the process of placing themselves physically, psychologically and emotionally, in testing conditions. One element that gave my data its 'depth' is that it was extraordinarily embedded in real places, real lives and the real experiences of volunteers. The dangerous environment in this context was not abstract, it was actual. As one crew member recounted: 'The sea doesn't treat you different just because you are on a lifeboat' (Luke, Crew Member).

To bring this point into sharper focus I will make use of an example which, I believe elucidates the richly textured sense of what these peoples' lives are like. The example is so qualitatively rich not just because of the danger and tragedy, but because of the deep familial and temporal sense it conveys:

I interviewed in a station which had just received a brand new STG £2M lifeboat and asked the coxswain how it felt to be coming home with this fantastic new boat, bigger and faster than their old boat. He told me that himself and his crew, eight in total, had flown to Poole and then they had to take the boat home over the Irish Sea. Prior to him, this man's father had been the coxswain of the lifeboat so he had very much grown up around the lifeboat station and when he finally reached the age of seventeen he was permitted to go to sea on the lifeboat. On his very first rescue, on Christmas Eve in horrendous weather conditions, the lifeboat capsized twice and a crew man was lost. My respondent described it as 'a baptism of fire' (Christy, Coxswain).

Thirty-three years later, now as coxswain in charge of brand new boat, pulling out of the marina at RNLI headquarters at Poole on his crew was the son of the man who had died that night. When they motored into open seas:

> We had a meeting on the stern, a quiet moment for all that had gone …
> you remember the people gone before you and things like that … it is a
> bonding thing and everyone knows that and you know, it's all part of it
> as well.

It is difficult to do justice to reconstructing the intensity of this man's feeling as he relayed this story[11], but I got a semblance of a cuttingly deep personal trauma which he and other survivors of that tragedy had endured. A sense of unanswered questions abounded. Could they have done anything different to avoid the disastrous outcome of that night? Why the deceased crewman's son subsequently joined the lifeboat? How did he feel taking to the waters that had claimed the life of his father when he was a young child? That the bonding process was more profound and intensified as a result of those tragic events of Christmas Eve and subsequent local disasters became clear. It was the operational volunteers who are very much on the 'sharp end' of danger.

I will now present some additional examples of this to substantiate and advance my perilous volunteering concept and then will go on to elaborate on

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[11] Harrowing stories of danger, risk, tragedy and heartbreak abounded in the data collection phase of this research. It is important to emphasize that these narratives were not relayed with anything akin to boastfulness, pride or self-aggrandizing heroism. Rather they were told in a quietly wistful, regretful ways, sometimes emotionally. The history of loss through the perilous activity of lifeboating and the mental and emotional traumas such as post traumatic stress disorder these tragedies generate undoubtedly contributes to the meaning that lifeboating is experienced as an incredibly profound activity for those involved.

what this means for control and autonomy within the organization. Emotional danger appeared to be a substantial risk for volunteers:

> It's very stressful when you are dealing with, for instance I think we had something like fourteen suicides here in three years. And I'll give you an instance, I brought my daughter and her two friends to the pub one Saturday night and I brought them home and the third girl didn't come home. I got a phone call the next morning she was missing, and I picked her out of the water myself. (Ben, Station Chairman)

It was not just the responsibility of responding to the local community and mariners in local waters which contributed to mental and emotional pressures. The crewing decisions that coxswains had to take when a search was launched had life-or-death consequences:

> So the practical element [of the sea conditions] is one side, the other element then is the softer side, are you going to choose someone that has got a young family, someone who is married, single? Who are you going to put out there tonight? And that's quite a lot to take on board and make that decision, and know that you [the coxswain] are making that decision for the reason that they may not come back. (Steven, RNLI Manager)

This study proposes the concept of perilous volunteering to denote volunteering activities whereby the volunteer, by personal volition and having some prior regard to the risks that may be at stake, voluntarily engages in dangerous voluntary activity which may result in serious and/or significant personal bodily or emotional harm or distress, up to and including loss of life. In setting out the empirical findings of this research, it has been my argument that an individual's experience of perilous volunteering situations is qualitatively different to reported experiences of other volunteering contexts. For example, a research situation where respondents inform a researcher: 'we have a saying 'drown you may, but go you must'' (Pat, Mechanic) is obviously not only distinctive but also extraordinary and, moreover, unexplained by extant research (a partial exception to this being Thornbarrow and Brown's (2009) study of paratroopers, although they of course, are paid). Clearly, the accounts presented throughout the findings chapters are poignant examples of perilous volunteering.

Perilous volunteering assists towards explaining the 'thickness' and ownership attached to the volunteer role. Experiencing, physically and emotionally, what was known as 'the sharp end' (Roderick, RNLI Director) was frequently reported by respondents as fundamentally contributing to the feelings of mutual solidarity felt by volunteers which worked to confirm their social identities and commitment to each other. This solidarity, loyalty and allegiance were pragmatically fashioned into bona fide teamwork and interpersonal trust aboard the lifeboat, with the coxswain as bricoleur (Lévi-Strauss, 1966; Duymedjian and Rúling, 2010), guiding, directing and mentoring:

We are a family like. When you are out there [at sea] you are relying on who is out there, who is coming behind you, who is near you. You are watching out for him and he is watching out for you. Everyone looks after each other. (Ross, Mechanic)

In the same rich vein, in her study of normative utopian communities Kanter (1968) found that feelings of 'we-ness' and 'communion' were crucial mechanisms in solidifying members' commitment to groups. I attest that this dynamic totally permeated local stations. Team spirit and camaraderie deeply guided not only actions but also self-referential thoughts of team members: 'You are all one team it's all of you together [out there]' (Peter, Second Coxswain). Deep bonding evolved over time and was intensified as a direct result of the (sometimes tragically realized) perils of lifeboating. The cultural identity and shared norms of the local station privileged this local bonding, this 'condition of communion' (Barnard, 1968: 148) to the extent of constructing and codifying local unambivalent 'rules' which facilitated the creation of 'nomos, order, out of chaos' (Berger and Berger, 1973, cited in Watson 1994: 22), evidenced in practice here in Pat's response:

Jesus the one thing we have here is that if you fall over the side, go over the side, jump over the side somebody will be right after you. No matter what condition you are in, what speed you are going at, if you go in someone will be with you immediately. If they spot you they will be over with you and that's the rule we have. (Pat, Mechanic)

It was at the sharp end where true commitment to each other was very much evidenced and was what really counted in creating meaningful volunteer realities. Real solidarity and affective commitment, the negation of the self to the extent that an individual would jump into a dangerous sea to help his team-mate 'no matter what' was quite extraordinary and symbolized the sacrifice of the individual to the collective which allowed 'a group of individuals to crystallize into a team' (Lois, 1999:124, cf. Kanter, 1968)[12]. This local team orientation also worked in ways to produce and reinforce the ingroup/outgroup (Kramer, 1993) distinction between those who put their bodies on the line to live the organization's values and those who did not. Working at 'the sharp end' provided a very credible weight behind the mobilization of moral claims of ownership and legitimate control.

4.3.2 Narrating 'expert knowledge'

Perilous volunteering profoundly brought expert knowledge into sharper focus. It is worth noting here that danger and its resulting legal liability concerns were key reasons why HQ sought to control through standardization (SOPs) and bureaucracy (formal structure). Containment of physical and reputational risk drove HQ's priorities. The contestations regarding the construction of legitimate expertise, and in a more subtle way, claims to ownership, which critically framed the relationship between local and HQ, fundamentally pivoted on what expert knowledge was taken to be. This struggle for expertise was greatly informed by

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[12] Solidarity as a shared value of the RNLI community will be discussed in greater depth in the next chapter (section 5.1.4).

heuristics and the culture of maritime activities, where expert knowledge equates to firsthand experience in the waters in question, particularly for navigation purposes. Local knowledge of wind, weather, tides, swells, currents, depths and shoals, coastline, sea depth and temperature carved out the legitimacy of the local station because their knowledge base, unlike HQ's, infinitely pertained to the actual physical location where rescues took place. Legitimate expertise was 'owned' at a local level by volunteers, typically sons-of-sons-of-sons of lifeboatmen. Through the generations, valued local experience and resultant expertise was translated into a sense of legitimate authority over local activities and, moreover, led to the mobilization of a discourse of a moral right of ownership, self-management and autonomistic behaviours.

Legitimate authority was discursively reproduced throughout the organization. Paid staff in station-facing roles reported enhanced credibility and acceptance of their positions when volunteers knew that they had volunteering experience:

Respondent: What helps me the most is I used to be a crew member myself for five years so I know what it's like when guys in this building [divisional HQ] arrive down in their shirt and tie and their clean hands! So I have learned a bit from that…

Me: In that it gives you more…legitimacy?

Respondent: Yes, incredibly more because the stations know that and they knew that very cleverly before I got the job, there was a little spiel about me put around the stations and that was recorded. So you get an

instant credibility and it's really down to me whether I blow it or not.

(Joseph, RNLI Senior Manager)

In chapter three, I noted how the RNLI can be characterized as a high reliability organization (Weick et al., 1999). The five hallmarks of this type of organization are preoccupation with failure, reluctance to simplify interpretations, sensitivity to operations, commitment to resilience, and deference to expertise. I will now explore more deeply two of these points, commitment to resilience and deference to expertise, as I believe they have a significant bearing on the playout of control and autonomy in the context of the RNLI.

Volunteers were socialized and encouraged to vest huge trust in the boat and equipment because this was crucial for the smooth functioning of the overall service. One of the reasons that mechanics were employed full-time was to carry out series after series of maintenance checks to ensure the safety and seaworthiness of the boat:

They [volunteers] do go out in any conditions, everything is going to work and they feel safe. And the first thing we do with any of them is to take them out in rough weather, just to see if they like it and if they can handle it, but most of all, to see that they are safe, that the boat will not let you down, no matter what she [the lifeboat] does, even if she turns over she will turn back over again. If she tries to sink, you need to put ten holes in it before it will go down, so you know, they need to understand that and feel that. [In a previous job] I had worked with

lifeboats all around the coast, I had called them out, I had called out helicopters, search and rescue missions and all that. I admired them. I would stand there and look and see what they were doing and say 'God how do they do that?', and when they'd come back, you'd talk to them, and they had the biggest belief in their equipment, they thought it could go wrong but 'at least we've got the best possible equipment to do it'. And that's what I'm telling you now, anything that you see here, anything on that boat has been tried and tried and tried and tested and they train you the best way they can. They don't just do out and buy that, they make sure and make sure. And they are constantly upgrading everything. If I break something, if something snaps or gives, how did it happen? What caused it? (Pat, Mechanic)

A superficial analysis of the organization would suggest that because of volunteers' steadfastness to the ideals of saving lives at sea through immersing themselves in the line of danger, they occupied *all* the moral ground. A deeper explanation includes the quite remarkable work of HQ and the Institution of the RNLI, in their provision of *sine qua non* the most excellent equipment, boats and backup service possible. HQ's self-considered position of legitimate authority through their cumulative expertise and knowledge bank concerning maritime activities, coupled with their actual legal ownership of the lifeboat provided the firepower behind *their* claim to knowledge of and authority over what was 'right' and best to do. This is what Second Coxswain Frank meant when he spoke of the 'double edged thing', that 'the fact that they can provide this stuff

probably turns them into the arseholes that they are!', a point not lost on Pat, a Mechanic, as he explains the quite extraordinary support service at his disposal:

> If I need extra help to put that [part] on or fix it, they [the institution] are there on twenty-four hour standby cover. We have technicians that can come and help me if I need it. So there is back up after back up after back up. Sometimes it's frightening to see the amount of backup you have. You can literally call in the 151st airborne, they will move heaven and earth to get you. Even boats, to get you a replacement for that boat they will have it for you tomorrow if necessary, and the logistics of that would be to put it on the back of a lorry and ship it to Wales and we would have a crew mustered the next day to go over and get it. It's unbelievable what they will do just to get it here. (Pat, Mechanic)

Hence the construction of 'expert knowledge' was further brought into sharper focus if we take into account the prowess of HQ in designing, manufacturing and funding what are widely considered to be the best boats and equipment for lifesaving on the planet. The expert knowledge and commitment to resilience of HQ in this arena actively facilitated and supported the work of the local volunteer. So although volunteers operated at the 'sharp end' and danger and peril gave a very credible weight behind the mobilization of moral claims, moral ground, in this instance, cannot merely be conceptualized as a static possession of volunteers, on the contrary, it ebbed and flowed back and forth like the tides.

Manifestations and mechanisms of control and autonomy, meaning-making and group identity and the process of 'defining who you are by what you're not' (Elsbach and Bhattacharya, 2001: 393) were thus 'constructed, enacted and interpreted during every day interactions' among RNLI members (Golden-Biddle and Rao, 1997: 594).

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the findings under the themes of thick volunteering and danger, showing how control and autonomy were manifested through discourses and counter-discourses concerning ownership and rightful expertise. I have argued that the thickness of the volunteering is partly brought about by the solidarities fostered, partially resultant on the dangerous working environment, and deeply experienced in the relationships between team members. The theme of perilous volunteering provided a rich insight into the lives of the volunteers of the RNLI whilst furthering my concept of thick volunteering, which I have posited is a category of volunteering qualitatively different to other modes of volunteering. As I have shown, peril enhanced affective commitment amongst the team and brought claims of expert knowledge into sharper focus.

What has also come across, I hope, is the depth of emotional intensity which volunteers experienced. I have made explicit reference to this by proposing that those engaged in thick volunteering experienced salient *affective* as well as psychological ownership of the lifeboat, and deep commitment to each other. Emotions obviously played a significant role in members' organizational behaviour. Whilst acknowledging that 'no study of emotion can be entirely

unproblematic' (Coupland et al., 2008:331; also Sturdy, 2003) and that emotionality can be a 'politically sensitive performance of the self' (Patient et al., 2003) in some strategic way (e.g. Hepburn and Brown, 2001; Vince, 2006), the incidental manner and colloquial vocabularies by which volunteers expressed an idiosyncratic range of emotions – from anger to calm, anxiety to assurance, sadness to joy, passion, fear, pride and sorrow – seemed to me to be authentic and genuine expressions of their experiences within the RNLI. Emotions in this context are perhaps better conceptualized as signifiers of importance attached to attaining a particular goal (Ortony et al., 1998; Archer, 2000), in this case running an excellent station so that lives could be saved at sea. Those engaged in thick volunteering were passionate, committed and dedicated to the roles they performed to achieve that goal and experienced strong feelings of connectedness, embeddedness and belonging to their local lifeboat station.

The next chapter, which describes the findings under the themes of community and offshore, proceeds to further explain the dynamics at play within the RNLI, especially with regards to how meaning and identity were controlled

'To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognised need of the human soul'
(Simone Weil 1909-1943)

CHAPTER 5: COMMUNITY AND OFFSHORE AT THE RNLI

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the themes of community and offshore, and in doing so, shows how volunteers' self-referential understandings affected their organizational behaviour and their experiences of the RNLI. The chapter illustrates how understandings of community, place, identity and belonging were central to volunteers' accounts of autonomy and control at the RNLI, as these aspects of volunteers lives were particularly meaningful and brought to bear on their thick volunteering. The offshore theme shows how certain structural arrangements influenced control, autonomy and organizational identity. The chapter also demonstrates how discourses which made use of community and offshore were used by both management and volunteers, though in different ways, to negotiate identity, reinforce autonomy and confirm rightful ownership whilst also enacting expressions of power.

5.2 Theme B1: Community

In order to understand and theorize the lived experiences of organizational members and, in particular, to demonstrate how people and groups constructed and negotiated the realities they lived by, I have deployed the theme of 'community'. Clearly, community, identity and meaning intersect, and community is the specific construct through which I now investigate meaning

and identity. Community, as I will show, acted as a repository of meaning for volunteers (Cohen, 1985), and partly explained many other dynamics such as the 'thickness' of the volunteering (by that I mean the depth of commitment to the boat, the service, and each other, as explained in chapters two and four), the autonomous tendencies of local stations, and the sense of ownership on which I spoke at length in the previous chapter. Here, I will set out the findings which illustrate that, from the perspective of operational volunteers, community was complex, heterogeneous and multifaceted, and I will demonstrate how some forms of community actually worked as an exclusionary mechanism (Frazer, 1999), producing and reproducing, amongst other dynamics, the boundary line pertaining to 'the bonds of we' (Hornstein, 1976:62), not just physically but also symbolically in terms of the narrative organizational identity.

One of the most unusual and striking findings of this research was the peculiar mix of locality, kinship, community and communal relations, geography, history, tradition, custom and the spirit of neighbourly self-reliance which were all embedded into the formal and informal organization of the RNLI. Furthermore, ever present mythologies[1], symbolism and the nostalgic and evocative cultural heritage encircling the RNLI informed, in very powerful ways, the personal identities of volunteers, and, crucially for this study, volunteers' senses of, if not what the organization was, then emphatically, what it should have been. Entrenched in social relations within and across RNLI stations was the belief that the RNLI existed to serve a communal moral purpose

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[1] By this, following Grey (2012: 116) 'I do not mean "untruths", but simplified but meaningful stories…'

and need. The following three sections will unpack the theme of community in greater detail.

5.2.1 Kinship and family

I have already mentioned that many stations employed numerous members of the same family (typically a mix of fathers, sons, brothers, cousins and in-laws) and all four of my participating stations had multiple family members involved. Upon retirement of their fathers, the sons of mechanics and coxswains frequently took up those respective positions, which is an indication of the potential for the closed and insular tendencies of communities (Freidson, 1970). When asked how they first got into lifeboating, most respondents emphasized how it was a family tradition, explaining that their fathers, uncles, grandfathers, and great-grandfathers had been involved, at varying levels from coxswain to shore helper, in the local lifeboat of their day: 'well it's been in my family going back, my father was a lifeboat man and his father was, its been in the family' (Mick, Training Coordinator and Second Mechanic). Family ties indicated a kind of preferential recruitment based on the perception that you were known, you understood the work of the lifeboat, in a sense you already belonged and, therefore, could be trusted, particularly in the high stakes of perilous volunteering: '[my father had been on the boat] and you get took in because they know you are family' (Daragh, Coxswain).

Kin relationships, be they through shared blood, marriage or adoption, added a peculiar texture in that an extra-organizational source of meaning wove

together family and work ties. This almost pre-modern aspect[2] has always been a central feature of the RNLI's pedigree. Consideration of this rich organizational ancestry is crucial in order to avoid an account replete with 'bland ahistoricism' (McGrath, 2005: 551, Grey and Sturdy, 2009), one without concern for the history or historical development of the organization, which, as I have already argued (in sections 3.1 and 4.2.10) informed the present-day ethos of the RNLI. The kinship family, which is 'no doubt, the oldest and longest running social unit in our world' (Zachary, 2011: 26) can also be theorized as a community in itself, and family ties added an enduring idiosyncrasy to the organization, both in their presence and effect[3]. Theorists believe that powerful emotional and relational issues arising from kinship links greatly impact upon organizational behaviour (Collins and O'Regan, 2011), with norms and altruism (Rothausen, 1999) a central antecedent of behaviour determinants. In family businesses, trust and altruism is fostered and bolstered through networks and long-term relationships (Anderson et al., 2005; Carney, 2005; Karra et al, 2006), and there is reason to believe the same dynamics occurred at the RNLI.

A local family's proud history and tradition of lifeboating acted not only as a recruitment resource for the RNLI, but also perhaps instilled and perpetuated a family norm and tradition that lifeboating was somewhat expected

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[2] In the sense of dating in general to the era before the industrial revolution, where families and business existed to a great extent in conjunction with each other (Zachary, 2011; cf. Pollard, 1965; Kepner, 1983; Heck et al., 1995; Morck and Yeung, 2004). Indeed, Colli (2002) notes how, as a structure, family businesses predate most forms of market structures.

[3] The burgeoning family business literature is perhaps the most relevant here. This literature argues that family ties in business lead to more complexity in decision making due to the interplay of family dynamics (Hess, 2006; Gersick et al., 1997). Because of the involvement of family members (Chua et al, 1999; Chrisman et al., 2003) family businesses differ from other firm types in terms of ownership, approach to leadership and relationships and philosophies (Dyer, 2003; Miller and LeBreton-Miller, 2005; Collins and O'Regan, 2011).

of family members, particularly young men. It is in this respect that one questions whether volunteers entered the dangerous work of the RNLI due to choice, obligation or necessity[4]. I have already argued through the thick volunteering concept that membership of the RNLI was constructed and tied to the self as a defining aspect of personal identity. When membership was also entwined with kinship, the identification link grew stronger as individuals came to define the self by characteristics they believed defined the organizational identity (Dutton et al., 1994), leaning especially on their interpretation of the RNLI as a large family. This incredibly complex set of interrelationships helped to explain various dynamics at play within the RNLI, not least that some forms of meaning and identity were extra-organizational rather than just a different kind of identity encouraged by HQ (the latter being that which most literature on identity-regulation reports on). Social capital such as trust, loyalty and knowledge, and human capital such as time, energy and emotional support were undoubtedly bolstered by the involvement of families throughout the network, and these social and familial ties acted to bond members tightly to each other[5].

As lifeboating was 'bred into' volunteers (Christy, Coxswain), kinship ties acted to disclaim HQ's structures of meaning, particularly vis-à-vis direct bureaucratic controls, to claim a deeper and more temporally respectful meaning

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[4] Do RNLI volunteers choose danger? This is, I believe, a fascinating insight but its development is unfortunately largely beyond the scope of this thesis. Interestingly, Adler et al. (2008), drawing on Tonnies (1957) posit that the basis of trust in Gemeinschaft relations forms from 'loyalty, honor, duty and status deference' (2008: 366), which suggests a norm-based tradition, possibly even obligation, of volunteering behavior. The structure/agency debate with regards to volunteering is addressed in chapter seven. However, additional, more pointed data collection would be required in order to fully address this question.

[5] Space constraints restrict any detailed commentary but in Tonnies (1957) classic terms, the Gemeinschaft form of community appeared to be the dominant force, with the values of loyalty, honour and duty forming the basis of trust. The 'togetherness' embodied in every crew will be discussed in greater detail in section 5.1.4.

of the lifeboat. The expert local knowledge, often tacit, handed down generationally from 'very gnarled old experienced coxswains who have been at sea all their life and their father and grandfather before them' (Eithne, RNLI Director) normalised, embedded and reproduced the local cultural understandings of thick volunteering and rightful autonomy, understandings and values which made organized local action possible. In conjunction with the circumstances of danger, kinship acted as a bind, unifying volunteers and making them psychologically closer.

Moreover, 'family', used as a 'discursive device' (Edwards and Potter, 1992: 68; Whittle and Mueller, 2012), went much further than just describing kin relations. It was also used to build different, polyphonic emplotments of the story of the RNLI (Boje, 2001; Whittle and Mueller, 2012), one of these being the story of the solidarity evident within and among stations. Notions of family were extraordinarily frequent throughout the data, with almost all of my forty respondents describing the RNLI as a family[6]. In my reading, family as a metaphor denoted two meanings. The first, "family by choice" represented volunteers' pride and gladness to belong. What I am trying to capture here is the sense that even though many members were not related by blood, they still felt related and close (this is perhaps an idealization of family, a usage of family as

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[6] I am aware that the family metaphor appears in many accounts of all types of organizational literature, from corporate culturalism (which advocates the advantages of team-family style structures for engendering employee participation) to accounts of how organizations position themselves as 'one big family' to attract and retain customers (for example Mills et al.'s (2001) account of the Saturn Corporation) to critical management studies and psychoanalytical research which examines the ways subjectivity and control are constructed through the mobilization of the family concept (examples include Casey's (1999) account of the Hephaestus team-family culture and Parker's (1995) research on how family infiltrated individuals' identities at Vulcan). As presented here in my research findings , I am not positioning 'family' as being aligned to one body of literature or the other, I am merely introducing *in vivo* the language which respondents disclosed to me.

what it *ought* to be). The second reading is that of a description of the quality or nature of the relationship. Yet this must be qualified – respondents spoke about 'family' in different ways and opinions on where the family line was drawn varied, which indicated some shared and some only partly shared narratives regarding organizational identity (Brown, 2006). For example, some volunteers limited 'family' to within the station boundary:

> These people that you are working with, that you are with every day, you are out on shouts with, that you are put into danger along with, go on rescues, they are like a family, that's as much as you can say. As for Poole and as for everywhere else, that's where you go to do your training, you are not going to make…you meet people, but *these* are local people that you are living with every day. (Ciarán, Crew Member)

Steadfast devotion and commitment to the local station was typically characterised by those engaged in thick volunteering as of the utmost importance in making possible the mutual pride, respect and camaraderie which bonded crew members together and made individuals feel they were part of a team: 'the little family here, that is where my loyalties lie' (Luke, Crew Member).

Others thought family to be representative of the sentiment and spirit both inter- and intra-station due to stations' mutual understanding and solidaristic orientation towards each other. Some respondents were keen to stress that the bond of solidarity and mutual support within the social network did not arise *solely* as a result of a utilitarian necessary dependence. The bond was

deeper than instrumentality and based on a number of factors – the communion of common interest which brought about trust and togetherness, the knowledge of previous tragedy which brought about an emotional connection and the physically difficult working conditions which facilitated empathy. Here, a coxswain shows how these sentiments led to a genuine and sincere feeling of 'personal comfort in social relations' (Barnard, 1968:148):

[Relations between stations] are a closer bond than a social bond. It is a family bond because they [we] have the same understanding of each other and what each other does to such a level that it becomes more family than social. We know exactly what the lads in Clifden do or go through on a shout. They know what we go through. (Seán, Coxswain)

Interestingly, the trust woven over time into station-to-station interactions also led to an informal network or community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) where ideas, knowledge and information were shared. These interactions served to reinforce the tightness of station to station bonds:

If you have a problem, somebody else in the same position has already had the problem and you can call on him and give him a ring, so that sense of family again is reinforced by that. (Charlie, Lifeboat Operations Manager)

Others, most notably HQ staff, felt that the family spirit and ethos pervaded the whole organization, paid staff and strategic apex included: 'once you are in the RNLI there is an immediate connection [with other RNLI members] …it can be described as a family' (Dennis, RNLI Senior Manager). Many respondents spoke of having built deep, enduring friendships with crew from all over Ireland and the UK which served to heighten their commitment to each other and steadfasten their ongoing membership of the organization.

Ironically, the family spirit, through promulgated from the highest formal levels, worked in ways against HQ as it tended to reject the managerial way of doing 'business' in favour of a more open and shared decision making:

We are an organisation that's very…too much so in my opinion…we're collaborative…it's the RNLI family thing…this thing about the right to consult. The idea of a management prerogative, you have to handle it really carefully because sometimes if you just do things 'that's how it has to be', people have a view here, quite unrealistically at times, that people should be consulted to the Nth degree. And we have done that in the past, and that's why we don't get things done quickly'. (Eithne, RNLI Director)

In the above account, Eithne explained how notions of family can also provide meaning and identity cues for the strategic apex of the organization, and how organizational acting in character (Douglas, 1987) can be a delicate balancing act. The identity which drew on commitment and psychological ownership was

clearly something the RNLI did not wish to destroy, but it also caused them problems. In the main, however, RNLI workers used the metaphor of family to symbolise not just the kinship family, but the cognitive and affective bonds, sense of commitment, reciprocal trust and solidarity inherent in 'looking after each other' (Seán, Coxswain). The next section explores how this was embedded within a particular locality.

5.2.2 Community of place

The spatially-bound community of the village or town in the geographical meaning of a physical place, piece of coastline and area of sea provided a wealth of information on how individuals approached and derived meaning and identity referents for the construction of the self and organizational identities. This section considers the importance of place for the production of identity and shows how community of place also helped to explain the ownership inherent in thick volunteering and the autonomous tendencies stemming from notions of rightful expertise which led to the ritual negation of managerial control.

In many ways, local volunteers thought of and used a sense of community of place to make sense of themselves and their history, thus giving weight to Dixon and Durrheim's assertion that 'questions of 'who we are' are often intimately related to questions of 'where we are'' (2000: 27):

Me: How do you think the old traditions of the RNLI feed into the modern-day RNLI?

Respondent: Well most of them are still around, their families are still around the stations, and it's station history. I know you can't live in the past but it's what made you, the town and the station; it's what the building blocks of the station was. (Daragh, Coxswain)

This connection to the material dimension, often overlooked in other accounts of high commitment organizations (as also noted by Fleming and Spicer, 2003), crystallized community of place as a central bearing point, not only in the meanings people formed and attached to their voluntary work, but also in how individuals 'constructed, enacted and interpreted' (Golden-Biddle and Rao, 1997: 594) the organization's narrative identity:

[The RNLI] has always been run at a local level, and a part of the community in every community and if that is lost then the heart goes out of it…I think the spirit is that one it's local and two it's voluntary. (Conor, Mechanic)

The identity-narrative authored by Conor made clear that he considered local and voluntary to be central and enduring components of the RNLI's organizational identity. However, for the strategic apex, the 'local' authored into the organizational identity by volunteers came at a real cost:

[The organization has] an absolute absence of horizontal integration. And that's really interesting. Because that's part of the sort of almost

the villagy network sort of feeding back into the organization. And it's

costing us a huge amount of money. (John, RNLI Director).

Social and environmental psychologists have long emphasised 'the importance

of place for creating and maintaining a sense of self[7]' (Dixon and Durrheim,

2000: 27; cf. Sarbin, 1983; Rowles, 1983; Korpela, 1989; Simon et al., 1995). At

the curious intersection of the RNLI's geography and history, ownership and

identity were bound to the local community, past and present. This is not to say

that the predominant view was that all volunteers *must* come from and be firmly

rooted in the local community, but it was clear from respondents' answers that

integration with the group was easier, motivation for joining were treated with

less circumspection, and expectations that the prospective volunteer would

'make it' through the probationary period were higher if the prospective

volunteer was known to at least one current member of the local station. All

identities are indeed based on inclusion and exclusion, and joining 'the bonds of

we' (Hornstein, 1976: 62) was made more difficult for those who were relatively

unknown. Informal enquires were made around the locale to ensure that

prospective members were suitable and desirable, with those considered less so

being fobbed off in one way or another.

The emotional and subjective attachment people had to particular locales

which enabled the production and consumption of meanings (Tyler, 2011) were

clear in Pat's account: 'I have been all over and home is always home. And I'd

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[7] Interdisciplinary research on space, work and organization is becoming more prevalent within the fields of organization theory and organizational behaviour, for example Baldry, 1999; Kornberger and Clegg, 2004; Dale, 2005; Dale and Burrell, 2007.

always identify with the people and the people that went before me' (Pat, Mechanic). As Dale (2005) has successfully argued, aspects of materiality are inherent in the ideational levels of discourse, culture and identity, represented in this case by one director: 'Each station is an RNLI. That is their world, that is the RNLI for them' (Eithne, RNLI Director). Equally, as Pat's response indicates, not only was there a special, unique and rooted quality about 'home', but also, meanings were grafted from the past as well as the present (Parry, 2003). Place was indeed a 'meaningful location' (Cresswell, 2004: 7).

The respective lifeboat stations were very much situated in localities and embedded within their cultural heritages. As I explained in the previous section, volunteers were recruited from local families, many with extensive roots in the local lifeboat community. The most obvious manifestation of each station's situatedness was the presence of the lifeboat station, or 'house' (as it was colloquially termed) where the boat was housed or moored alongside. Volunteers sense of situatedness in conjunction with their engagement in perilous work made the home port all the more important for what it symbolized – a physically and emotionally safe space away from the dangers of volunteering – and acted as – the physical manifestation of belonging to a community. Volunteers also spoke of recovering bodies and getting them 'home' to where they belonged in an almost spiritual sense. One volunteer spoke of his thoughts when recovering a body from the sea: 'the main thing was just don't let her go, don't lose her…bring her home…' (Mick, Second Mechanic).

Belonging is widely theorized as being at the core of the place-identity psychological structure (Tuan, 1980; Korpela, 1989; Cuba and Hummon, 1993),

and helped to explain two important aspects of this study, namely why respondents characterised their ongoing engagement with the RNLI as analogous to belonging to a family and secondly, the deep attachment, commitment and sense of ownership volunteers felt towards the RNLI. To unpack this complexity and frame the presentation of this data, I will use the analytical insights from Rowles's (1983) work on dimensions of attachment.

Rowles's fascinating research on Appalachian communities theorizes three complementary senses of 'insideness' or affinity to community surroundings. 'Physical insideness' denotes bodily awareness of the environment and a sense of tacit knowledge of the physical details of the place. 'Social insideness' conveys the sense of connection and 'integration within the social fabric' of a community, and 'autobiographic insideness' expresses an individual's personal and distinctive sense of rootedness which arises out of their dealings within a place over time (1983: 302). As I will now illustrate, all three dimensions of insideness were internalized by RNLI volunteers.

Physical insideness was represented in the way that volunteers spoke about their community of place, particularly in terms of their knowledge of local seas, coastlines, tides, breaks and weather patterns. Furthermore, the local space was socially imagined (Bachalard, 1958) as 'ours', with the community belonging to them, and they and the lifeboat belonging to the community. The narrative of the self and construction of personhood was very much tied up in the local: '[each station] are their own community, they are for their local community' (Dave, RNLI Senior Manager). The 'lure of the local' (Lippard, 1997:1) was evident in the accounts of respondents: 'ah we feel local based, you

know' (Pierce, Second Coxswain), and the emotional attachment tied to their sense of place was summed up in Pat's response 'home is always home'.

Discursive mobilizations of expert knowledge drew heavily on physical insideness. Intimately knowing and belonging to the locality led to the occasional outright resistance of SOPs because volunteers felt that *they knew best* how to enact successful rescues in *their* locality:

> Ok well lets say there was a boat going up on the rocks and it was a force seven [wind] and the big boat [ALB] can't get in towards the rocks and there are four lads on the boat and you knew they were going to drown and get bashed into the rocks, and you have the daughter boat on top and its only allowed to go out in a force four…you are not going to say 'I am going to leave them there and get bashed on the rocks'…but that would be a [SOP] governed thing. (Ciarán, Crew Member)

In Ciarán's account, the production of the self is made vividly evident as a result of the dangerous working conditions of a known locality. He, emphatically, *will not leave them there to get bashed on the rocks* and this deeply informs, and, crucially, is informed by, who he is and what he and *his RNLI* stand for. HQ's desire for standardization was counteracted by these meaning-laden affirmations of autonomous self-identities, which allowed volunteers space 'to do what you think [is right] on the night… get into it, get the job done' (Ben, Station Chairman). Autonomy, manifested within expert local knowledge, was fiercely

guarded as a right and a requirement in the face of HQ's perceived attempt to overly determine rescue behaviour on the boat.

Each RNLI station was deeply integrated in their local community, evidence of their social insideness. As volunteers were from and of the locality, the deep ties were partly a result of their emotional, familial and physical proximity to the cause. In these erstwhile tight-knit fishing villages, rescues could be for the benefit of oneself or one's family:

[If they are fishermen] well their whole livelihood is the sea then, their work is the sea, everything is the sea. The lifeboat is more important to them lads because they could be wanting it. (Christy, Coxswain)

In addition, many respondents emphasized the high level of local kudos stemming from belonging to the organization:

People in the community would say 'it's a great job that you do' and they do recognise you, and the community have always turned out at any fundraising, they are always one hundred percent behind the RNLI in this community. (Tom, Crew Member)

This high level of integration within the social fabric of the locality coupled with the family involvement heightened volunteers' psychological location of the 'safe' self within the local station. Volunteers' internalization of these deep

commitments went so far as to restrict their movements and tie their physical selves to the locality:

> The coxswain has to be here [in town]. [Coxswain A] can't leave town unless he rings [Coxswain B and Coxswain C] and makes sure one of them is in town. (Luke, Crew Member)

Clearly, volunteers were self-disciplined by their commitment to the boat and each other. In a similar account to Luke's above, a paid coxswain drew a startling analogy: 'When you finish work at five pm you are still tied. Prisoners have more freedom' (Seán, Coxswain). These accounts show that both volunteers and paid operational staff's physical presence was incorporated into their social control (Dale, 2005). Reflecting back on what I said about the paradox of volunteering in chapter two, regardless of whether this was by choice, norm or necessity, its net effect was to control workers. In any case, deep identification with the local station was evident in volunteers' expressions of commitment, dedication, pride and loyalty towards their station:

> [Being part of this station] means a hell of a lot, it does yes. I have so much pride in the whole set-up here. I have so much pride in this station, total pride in this crew, total pride in the boat. (Fiach, Coxswain)

This is also perhaps what Peter meant when he said: 'You go out and you are risking your life but at the same time you are happy at it' (Peter, Crew Member).

Social insideness also conferred an interesting space in which to analyse the relationship between stations and HQ. It became clear that HQ identified community as a valuable resource to be instrumentally drawn upon by the organization, particularly in terms of fundraising:

I was in Ilfracombe the other day and it doesn't say 'RNLI lifeboat', it says 'Ilfracombe lifeboat'. I quite like the fact that there is a fairly strong level of localized branding because that increases localized ownership'. (John, RNLI Director)

For HQ, community was a crucial asset that provided a constant flow of willing volunteers, funding and impetus for the service. Abstract notions of 'community' and 'family' were used to solve problems, to gather the organization together and to anchor the formal RNLI narrative to local stations. By abstract, I mean that HQ's use of community was different to that of local stations in that it was not concrete and embodied. In this storytelling narrative of the organizational identity, HQ played on the nostalgic, sentimental sense of belonging to a community, in order to 'manipulate the present by romanticizing the past' (Mills et al., 2001: 131). The use-value in this imagery was not lost on operational volunteers or indeed general staff who wittily developed rhetoric of their own. HQ in Poole was called 'the Kremlin' or 'Disneyland', and divisional HQ in Dublin was termed 'Eurodisney, the cheap Disney' (Karen, RNLI Trainer

Assessor). These very different metaphors were used for different occasions. Signifying a place of total power, the Kremlin metonym was used in situations where local stations perceived their autonomy to be unfairly and bureaucratically limited by the 'fortress' in Poole. The Disney analogy, used to signify a place of complete fantasy, was used by volunteers in response to seemingly ridiculous time-consuming requests from HQ where volunteers felt they were being asked to do too much with too little.

The autobiographic insideness was constructed not just from the familial rootedness in a particular locality but also in the deep identification over time which stemmed from growing up with the lifeboat. Volunteers' spoke of being reared to the lifeboat, which was 'bred into' them. They owned the lifeboat because they belonged to it, it was part of who they thought themselves to be and it was part of their family's life story. The opportunities which membership conferred – to learn, develop, grow and be afforded status and respect, all contributed to shared social understandings of the lifeboat's value in the community, and propelled volunteers to psychologically locate themselves within this grouping, where the majority of their peers shared the same understandings: 'I know the lads [other volunteers]…they would be the very same as myself they were reared to it' (Christy, Coxswain). This solidarity characterised by reciprocal trust bound volunteers to the boat and to each other, on which I will speak in greater depth in section 5.2.4. Volunteers also made sense of the kind of person they were (Watson, 1994a) through their helping behaviours within the local community and it is to that I now turn to discuss.

5.2.3 Community service and helping

At the core of the organizational identity, and indeed the driving force and purpose for the initial establishment of the RNLI, was the belief that the RNLI was a community help organization on an, initially national, and, now, international scale. Enshrined in the Charter of Incorporation and Bye-Laws of the organization is its *raison d'être:* 'for the preservation of life from shipwreck' (RNLI Charter of Incorporation, 1860: 1). Just as helping behaviours were a major reason for the organization's founding, as I will now show, community helping was very much a manifestation of what the boat stood for and meant, and acted as a self and organizational identity referent for management and volunteers alike:

> Everyone believes that they are working for the purpose of saving lives
> at sea and that's because that's what they are doing…everyone does the
> job they do because they know what the end purpose is: for saving lives
> at sea. I doubt it's as beautiful as that, but I think that everyone knows
> what their function is and why their function is there. (Karen, RNLI
> Trainer-Assessor)

> How do I feel being part of this organisation? This one in Baltimore?
> Well obviously it's my local station. It means something to me to be
> able to go out and help some people who are in trouble. I know most of
> the community around here, believe it or not… why else do you do it?
> You are saving lives if you can at all…. I'd like to think that I can go

out and help out, community service call it what you want…I like being

part of a team as well, part of something outside work…you are

meeting guys who are on a level playing field, we are on the same

wavelength, the same page, so its nice. (Cathal, Crew Member).

Coupled with the traditional family and kinship links, and the way that the sense

of self was very much bound up with locality, volunteers often drew on a helping

discourse which enabled them to make sense of themselves and the organization:

'To me it's doing something for the good of others without expecting any money

from it, you love doing it, otherwise you wouldn't be [doing it]' (Rory, Crew

Member). The meaning of the boat and what the overall organization stood for

was found in the nexus between knowledge of the dangers involved in sea-faring

communities and the deeply-held shared conviction of a moral need of helping to

prevent tragedy:

Me: What does the RNLI mean to you?

Respondent: Just saving people. Helping out as much as you can. I

suppose putting back into the community and there's a lot of families

around with people fishing and you get them back safe if they ever got

in trouble, so you'd…just the thing to help out.   (Richard, Crew

Member)

From an individual identity construction perspective, it is widely understood that

'people seek roles in which they can express core aspects of self' (Reich, 2000:

425; cf. Katz and Kahn, 1978; Schlenker, 1985; Swann, 1987; Backman, 1988). In light of the deep repositories of meaning and emotional attachment which family, community, local culture and tradition evoked, the desire to help fellow sea goers in need was experienced as a self-defining central feature of 'who I really am'. It is also worth noting here that under International Conventions, maritime users have a legal obligation to help proximate vessels in distress (International Maritime Organization, 1974). More informally, this value is also enshrined in seafaring culture. This personally held value and belief, handed down generationally over time, that volunteering for the lifeboat was the right thing, so much so as to possibly be the 'natural' thing to do, enabled volunteers, in a very real way, to live their values. Self-identity was thus constructed in tune with these deeply held values and beliefs (Grönlund, 2011) and engagement in volunteering provided individuals with a point of reference for defining their identities (Wuthnow, 1991, Haski-Leventhal and Cnaan, 2009). The depth of commitment and attachment to the lifeboat service represented the reality that the boat and service were experienced as a major part of the self. As explained by Rosemary Kanter:

> Commitment means the attachment of the self to the requirements of social relations that are seen as self expressive…a person is committed to the extent that he sees it as expressing or fulfilling some fundamental part of himself. (Kanter, 1972: 66)

It was through these psychological and affective attachments that the physical boat also became symbolically endowed as belonging to the community and standing for communal helping. The emotional attachment inherent in thick volunteering was clear in the way that respondents spoke of the 'heart' of the RNLI:

Me: Would things be different if you were paid?

Respondent: I would say it would be yes, it would be more serious then. It's serious anyway but anything that money is involved in you loose *values* then. So I don't think it should, because if you are a volunteer you are doing it with your heart, whereas if there is money involved…you know yourself. (Rory, Crew Member)

The principle of helping the local community was enshrined within what the organization meant to volunteers and management alike. One possible reason for this is that any departure from this common organizational script and identity narrative would have led to resistance and rebellion (Fineman and Sturdy, 1997) from volunteers. One director, mindful of protecting the organization's integrity, spoke of the process of drawing up the official vision and values statement (reproduced in section 3.1.2) and in doing so, having to be especially cognisant of the 'things we will not change' which are listed in the statement as (1) Volunteer ethos, (2) Independent of government, (3) Major charity, community based, (4) Maritime and (5) Heritage:

[Some aspects are] the edge of the minefield, places where we simply won't go, things that we will not change at all. And we got the five things that we believe are absolutely fundamental, structurally fundamental to the nature and the public's understanding of this organisation. And there is a thing that whatever else I do …someone should blow the whistle if ever I step on any of those. So that defines, I suppose, the ethos of the organization. (John, RNLI Director)

Both paid and unpaid RNLI workers expressed their identification with a shared narrative organizational identity which represented the RNLI as a community self-help resource:

What is the meaning of work here? I think the meaning of work here, for me it's about being in tune with the vision and values of the RNLI. It sounds a bit corny but it's the best way of describing it. And actually identifying my work with the end product, which is actually saving people's lives, we do actually do that, and stop them getting into trouble. And that's really important and a great way to earn a living. (Dennis, RNLI Senior Manager)

One aspect which bound volunteers to the organization and affiliated them with Poole was the realisation that HQ was also 'out there trying to do their best' (Christy, Coxswain) to facilitate the organization's aims:

> Probably on a scale of one to ten I would tend [to identify] more
> towards the station than to Poole. But equally, because I am the
> manager I would have to stay aloof from some of the things that are
> going on and try to stay objective to understand Poole's position on
> something or Dublin's position on something, and get that across to the
> lads here on the ground who are probably saying 'would they ever fuck
> off that shower'. But you have to try and understand their [Poole's]
> position and get that across. (Finn, Lifeboat Operations Manager)

Although, as I have shown here and in the previous chapter, frequent tensions between HQ and local stations arose, particularly as regards who was trying to speak for whom and for what and how particular narratives got taken up as truth and reality, the relationship was not necessarily always conflictual, and certainly not malevolent. The self-help and self-reliance autonomous aspects of local community helping, in HQ's view, had to be balanced with a duty of care and containment of risk, manifested in bureaucratization and standardized procedures. Indeed, this was HQ's way of 'helping'. So, some perceptions of the narrative organizational identity were, to lesser and greater extents, shared, and others only partly shared, or not shared at all (Brown, 2006). For volunteers, the RNLI was definitively a voluntary organization run by the local community for (mostly) the local community, and expertise resided at a local level. HQ's organizational identity-relevant narrative, whilst seeking to respect volunteers, privileged central direction, management and control under the auspices of HQ's

legitimate professional expertise. Little wonder that contestations revolved around who 'owned' the lifeboat!

5.2.4 Solidarity and trust: Communal integration

In sections 4.2.1, 4.3.1 and 5.2.1 I touched upon the role of solidarity and trust in creating and facilitating the relationships and culture of the RNLI. Throughout their interactions RNLI members displayed many aspects of communal integration. As I will now show, as regards inter- and intra- station relationships, trust featured greatly as a primary coordinating mechanism. As I have explained in the previous three sections, volunteers experienced psychological membership of a collective community of considerable shared history and shared interests. Solidarity and trust played a significant role in bonding together local stations by facilitating the feeling of 'we-ness' (Kanter, 1968) which was reported as permeating inter- and intra- station relationships. This experienced solidarity and trust helps to explain the depth of commitment and involvement volunteers felt towards the boat, the service and each other, and along with kinship, family, helping and community of place, elucidates what the boat and organization stood for and meant to volunteers. In a surprising and previously unexplained irony, trust also facilitated the high levels of clan control which operated within the group and worked to (self) discipline its members.

Permeating each crew and greatly informed by the dangers inherent in perilous volunteering were significant feelings of 'we-ness' (Kanter, 1968) and togetherness. This loyalty and allegiance to each other fostered a social identity which served to connect the individual to the collective (Kärreman and

Alvesson, 2004). The cohesion and solidarity which was evident within the relationship was a deep repository of meaning for volunteers, and an aspect they drew upon as they constructed their identities:

> These guys are so tight…they have a great respect for each other. They know that one day, their life might depend on their fellow crewman, and they know that these guys are highly trained, every one of them, every one of them going out on that boat is highly trained, so they know that they can rely on them. So it's trust, it's reliance, it's a belief that they will be ok with those other five guys when they go out, and they train together every week, they meet each other every week, they go out on exercises, they go away on courses even together sometimes. So they are kind of living like a….there's a togetherness that is embodied by every crew, I think, in the RNLI …again it comes back to that feeling of family, I think that it really is embodied here in the station, and the minute you come in the door you almost feel it, you almost tangibly feel it. (Charlie, Lifeboat Operations Manager)

Arguably, local volunteers thus experienced community as a set of value orientations, shared, more or less, by all members of the station (Adler and Heckscher, 2006; cf. Frazer, 1999; Etzioni, 1997). The 'togetherness that is embodied by every crew' came to be experienced as a norm and value of the station, and guided thoughts and actions about what were right and wrong ways to behave. This value orientation formed the basis for trust, as everyone could

then assume that the others would orient to those values and could therefore predict their actions and responses (Adler and Heckscher, 2006). The feelings of we-ness, the bond, acted to solidify volunteers' commitment to the group (Kanter, 1968), and through socialization, training and enduring long dangerous rescues together, volunteers developed empathy, respect and understanding of each other. Members became morally bound to the norms of solidarity and team work, and this explains the 'thickness' of their volunteering and their allegiance to one another. They committed to these shared values and displayed high levels of solidarity in their relations with each other (Ouchi, 1980), both inter- and intra- station. This respondent emphasized the role of danger in constructing the solidarity dynamic:

Of a bad night we were out there one night, ah it was back in 1999 and it was hurricane conditions and we got a bit of hardship we had problems with engines and the thing wasn't going right for us, one of them nights you wish you'd stayed in the bed! And there were fifty foot seas out there! We were trying to do our job, we were pulling a tug and the tug started pulling us backwards, the rope broke it caught in one of our engines and we lost an engine. And we told the coastguard what had happened, and next thing we hear [on the radio] Arklow lifeboat launch, and next thing we see the search lights coming they were coming alongside of us. And that meant so much to us that night, for moral support and knowing then if anything did go wrong they were

there to step in. (Ben, Station Chairman who was a crew member at the time of that incident)

A sense of shared trust was particularly evident in volunteers' responses. I have interpreted this as both informing and extending the solidaristic orientation and 'we-ness' innate to each collective crew. In other words, in my analysis of station-level RNLI, the phenomena of solidarity and trust mutually informed and generatively fed off each other as volunteers made sense of their environment. In a kind of continual processual loop, trust was both a pre-condition of, and a product of, the team. The literature has theorized trust as a key driver of the behaviour of individuals, particularly in situations like those facing RNLI volunteers where risk is high (Lois, 1999; Colquitt et al., 2011, 2007). In high reliability contexts 'failures by individuals to perform reliably in their roles can be catastrophic given the stakes involved' (Colquitt et al., 2011: 1000; cf. Weick et al., 1999; Bigley and Roberts, 2001). Trust reveals a willingness to be vulnerable 'based on a positive expectation of the intentions or behaviour of another' (Rosseau et al, 1998: 395; cf. Mayer et al., 1995). As considerations of a person's trustworthiness may be based on a combination of their perceived ability, integrity or benevolence (Colquitt et al., 2011), there are multiple dimensions on which trust can be assessed. I will now set out the evidence to show that trust was a great source of meaning and a crucial integrating factor for the smooth running of the organization.

Knowledge-based trust draws on a cognitive base and is rooted in assessments of integrity, ability, past performance and promise keeping (Shapiro

et al., 1992; Lewicki and Bunker, 1995; McAllister, 1995). Through their early socialization (including the proving of commitment in probation stage), regular team training and prolonged periods of time spent together, particularly in dangerous situations, volunteers *earned* the trust of their co-workers and crucially, learned to manage their skills so that they could act responsibly in life-and-death situations (Lois, 1999; Myers, 2005). Trustworthiness of this type was about being trusted to know your own limitations so as not to put others at undue risk: 'I know all the boys here, I know them well and I know what their limits, capabilities [are] as they know mine' (Mick, Second Mechanic). Assessments by coxswains of a volunteer's ability to safely get the job done were largely based on knowledge of respective volunteer's past experience with bad weather and judgements of how that volunteer performed under challenging conditions. Adversity served as a clear test of an individual's commitment (Lydon and Zanna, 1990). An experiential understanding of the difficult working conditions also worked in ways to form the basis of trust: 'You have to have a lot of trust in the LOM. Our particular LOM has a lot of seagoing experience so he understands a lot of the potential issues that I could have' (Fiach, Coxswain). In a similar vein, mechanics drew on cognitive, rational, logical reasons as to why they could and should trust their deputies:

Going out [on a shout] comes with the job but I have a second mechanic, third, fourth, fifth, they can go in my place as well, I could let them not a bother. I could trust them to do exactly what I would do

and I know its right, and they are tested in that. And made sure of that.

(Pat, Mechanic)

A second mode of trust, goodwill-based trust is affective in nature and is rooted in benevolence, emotional investment, caring and concern (McAllister, 1995; McAllister et al., 2006; Colquitt et al., 2011). Trust based on the caring relationship was clear in the response of this crew member:

What does being a team mean? Being a team, to work as a team I would feel that if you go on deck in a gale force ten and you have water washing across the decks and your safety harness hooked on, you get out there and in order to work as a team the guy in front of me has to trust me one hundred percent coming behind him, and if anything happens to him I am there for him. And likewise if anything happened to me. *I have to be one hundred percent clear in my mind that that guy behind me will give his life to save mine*. There has to be a huge level of trust, has to be. If you don't have that level of trust you can't work as a team. You have to have that level of trust. (Brendan, Crew Member)

Lastly, identification-based trust, again drawing on affective schemata, comes from a sense of shared values (Lewicki and Bunker, 1995; McAllister et al., 2006). I have already argued that volunteers attached such great importance and emotional significance to their membership of the RNLI that membership became a defining part of their self-concept. Identification with other team

members was a source of comfort and security (cf. Kärreman and Alvesson, 2004) for volunteers. I am not claiming here that volunteers were an entirely homogenous group, but certainly the communitarian values of trust and solidarity were passionately evident throughout the data, which suggested that trust and solidarity were shared values which influenced action, cognition and the construction of self:

> Pull together and trust each other. Camaraderie is a big thing. And we have that, without a doubt we have that. You have to be in it for the right reason, and anyone who does and commits themselves after their probation period, they have seen what it's like for the year, and if they stay on they are committed like, they really are. They are in it for the right things. Hence then there is a good bunch there. (John Paul, Coxswain)

Through their interactions volunteers became morally bound to the collectively shared values of trust and solidarity. Katz and Kahn (1978) touched upon a variant of this argument in their thesis on the social psychology of organizations:

> Motivation associated with value expression and self-identification…is particularly prevalent in voluntary organizations as volunteers are not likely to engage in efforts for the organization if they do not share at least some of the core values of the organization. (1978: 361)

Those who were, as John Paul iterates 'in it for the right reason' and stayed on after a tough probation period were those who had accepted the shared values and had come to see and experience them as guiding principles in their lives (Schwartz, 2007). The loyalty, empathy and solidarity evident in the actions described to me indicated that each station was a socio-emotional clan (Alvesson and Lindkvist, 1993). The clan, committed to meaningful and influential shared values and norms, also acted to control volunteers, an interesting dynamic which I will return to discuss later.

The values of trust and solidarity came to symbolize what the organization stood for and meant, and became internalized as volunteers constructed the self in tune with identifying with the organization. In this way, certainly at the beginning of their membership of the RNLI, trust and solidarity operated to (self) discipline members, as through identification processes, they came to define the self by the features they believed defined the organization (Dutton, 1994). In other words, volunteers felt that they *must* personally be trustworthy and be 'in it for the right reasons' in order for the psychological team, so crucial for the performance of the task, to be realised: 'Often times you may be in a position where you need somebody to take your back, and you have got to believe that that person can do it. That builds a team' (Seán, Coxswain). The 'I', the self-identity, was constructed in the interaction between the individual and others (Mead, 1964; Shotter, 1993). Volunteers were also aware that they were being observed by station leaders, and they were directly and straightforwardly disciplined at station level:

Often I do be over there [Poole] and I do be wondering what sort of a utopia is this place? Everybody is going around smiling, and it's all pleasant and all the rest of it and you wonder does anybody ever get angry and kick the office cat or something! It's totally different here! If somebody doesn't do what he was supposed to do they wouldn't be backward about that, about telling them in no uncertain terms! (Finn, Lifeboat Operations Manager)

Trust and reliability were also, quite cleverly, built-in to the organizational structural control system, a topic I will return to when I present the 'offshore' theme. This occurred in two ways, one much more explicit than the other. On an overall level, omnipresent SOPs were 'installed within organizational routines' in order to mechanically bestow predictability and reliability (Grey and Garsten, 2001: 234). A hierarchy of direct supervision was clearly enforced when the boat was on the water. To produce predictability and reliability the socio-technical principle of redundancy of function (the duplication of critical components) was embedded throughout the structure, with individuals trained for many roles so as to increase the overall reliability of the system:

Ah it's a machine. The boat and the six crew are a machine. And when parts of the machine break, which could be somebody getting sick, somebody getting hurt, an engine going, the radar breaking down or whatever else, the machine adjusts to compensate for it and still gets the job done. (Luke, Crew Member)

In a more subtle and taken for granted way the organizational design principle of self-managing teams also fostered local organizational control (cf. Barker, 1993). Local stations can be described as clans, and as such are subject to clan control (Ouchi, 1979). In clans, the locus of authority is value consensus and, certainly, commitment to the shared values of the group knowingly or unknowingly impacted the construction of realities volunteers lived by. The shared socio-ideological beliefs operated 'to produce and maintain the social order, in which the appropriateness and 'correctness' of social action and practice were clearly demarcated and bounded' (Dick, 2005: 1368). The values became guiding principles for volunteers, who, comparable to Barker's self-managing teams, were quick to point out if someone was overstepping the mark:

> Well I tell you the truth, if there was somebody acting the Mickey in the crew, the crew would turn around as quick as anybody…they would know quick enough that they are out of line with the rest of the crew, you know? Like, the other crew might pull on it before I would. (Christy, Coxswain)

The difference between clan control and concertive control is difficult to demarcate. Alvesson and Lindkvist's (1993) theorization of clan control emphasizes that norms are genuinely shared, and thus privileges the understanding that members' experiences of them are quite natural and organically produced. That RNLI members desired to adhere to norms indicates a phenomenon quite unaffected, 'real', and spontaneous, genuinely co-produced

by organizational members and in turn, reflected in their behaviour. Conversely, Barker's (1993) concertive control privileges the 'tutelary eye of the norm' (p. 432) whereby being under the constant eye of the norm was experienced as stressful, straining and burdensome. Drawing on the data I collected, it would appear that the dynamic operating at local level was more akin to the former than the latter. What I am saying here is that whilst self-identity was perhaps not a *target* of station managements' 'regulation' or 'manufacture' in the sinister, contrived, commissioned, insidious meaning of the word, discipline and regularity in relations with one another were expected of volunteers, who after going through a years probationary socialization, had, in all probability, gone through a process of self-adapting their own identities by connecting these morally binding norms of solidarity and trust to the self-concept. Bearing in mind the way that volunteers spoke of trust as a relational property that *had to be present* in order to enact a successful rescue suggests that volunteers would not have continually put their lives in peril without genuinely identifying with this shared belief system. In this way then, values, whether contrived or genuinely internalized, operated to self discipline members. Trust, as a value, was both a pre-condition of, and a product of, the team. In a kind of continuous processual loop, trust was required prior to setting out on a rescue and it also flowed from the enactment of successful rescues.

5.2.5 Conclusion of theme B1

In conclusion, this section has set out and untangled the interconnected set of relationships operating in the RNLI through the lens of community. The theme

of community has shown how, ironically, community served to both control and to bestow a source of autonomy on volunteers. Much literature on cultural control argues that culture leads individuals to believe they are gaining autonomy (Willmott, 1993). Here, volunteers resisted HQ's cultural control and reinforced their innate autonomy; thereby achieving political, critical and moral detachment from their "employers" power practices (Gabriel, 1999). Community was a meaningful source of autonomy because of the historical, cultural and psychological discourses which asserted the narratives of rightful ownership and expert knowledge of local RNLI members. Local community also suggested that its members were perhaps expected to volunteer, and if they so 'choose' to volunteer for the RNLI, that they acted in ways which respected what the boat and service stood for and meant, such as voluntary action, local helping, solidarity and trust.

5.3 Theme B2: Offshore

I have already emphasized how the RNLI was a very distinctive organization because of the switch of mode of organizational governance and control when the boat was launched. The work on the water was completely different to the work on land (cf. Barley and Kunda, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2011), and the structures of power within the organization, formal and informal, were dramatically altered once the lifeboat was launched. The most immediately visible and significant difference was the complete authority vested in the coxswain to run the shout as he saw fit. Ironically, at the very point of production, where one would imagine control was most needed, RNLI

management were physically absent, and volunteers' self-determination and self-management of the rescue thus worked to enhance their psychological ownership of the boat and service. Offshore was chosen as a sub-theme because on water was the place where what the boat stood for and meant really came to life for volunteers in the most significant ways. Offshore was the symbolic and material space where the community values of kinship, family, helping, solidarity and trust were most fully enacted.

5.3.1 Structural cues and culture in structure

The variation in the task context led to a change in the structural arrangements under which work was performed. The dangerous context at sea, as I have argued, privileged local expertise, discursively contested as it may have been. Expert knowledge, in turn, reinforced the moral right of local autonomy. Moreover though, local autonomy meant more than just a discursively mobilized 'truth' or ideology; it was also embedded into the structural arrangements of the RNLI. By structure I mean the institutionalized, relatively durable set of action patterns which were acquired by repetition (Czarniawska, 2008; Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2009). Within the broader context of the search and rescue (SAR) framework in Ireland, the RNLI declared its boats as assets to the Irish Coast Guard (the state body responsible for coordination of all SAR activities) who called on them as required. However, protected within this agreement was the proviso that: 'The RNLI reserves the right to direct its own assets, coordinated by the Coast Guard' (Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport of Ireland, 2010: 37). In practice, this meant that the coastguard contacted the local

launching authority and *requested* the boat, 'ask not task' (Pat, Mechanic). Ultimately, the decision to launch the lifeboat was made locally[8]:

So it [the lifeboat] belongs to us [the RNLI], but one of the strengths, one of the ways that the organisation structure works is that they [individual stations] have a high degree of autonomy; the local volunteer is asked if they are willing to say yes to a launch request from the government, the coast guard. And although it is very rare that they say no, it is their decision…*they* send their boat and their crew out to rescue somebody. (Dennis, RNLI Senior Manager)

5.3.2 The coxswain: Patriarch of the seas

Once the boat was launched, a very definite hierarchy was enacted and enshrined within the organization structure. On account of the nature of the activity, control became more horizontal *and* vertical because crew members had to be directed and co-ordinated. The coxswain's power, more latent in nature at the station, became, directly and formally, indisputable whilst at sea:

Once you step aboard a lifeboat you are under the command of the coxswain and that's the way it is because it can't be any other way. Somebody has to be making the decisions, it can't be a free-for-all…it

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[8] Arguably, as a result of this structural arrangement, the RNLI flies in the face of much conventional organization theory. It is clearly a bureaucracy but also manages to be a 'flat and effective network that is able to co-ordinate rapidly' (Chia, 1997: 702).

has stood the test of time all through the years of seafaring. (George,

Second Coxswain)

Unquestionably, the coxswains' power whilst at sea was considered socially approved and was accepted by those who became his subordinates. The coxswains' legitimate authority (Weber, 1946) appeared to stem from all three bases of power identified by Weber (1978) – rational-legal authority and the communal forms of tradition, and charisma. Rational-legal authority was derived from the formal organization structure and international maritime legislation: 'it is the coxswain's role to command that lifeboat in its entirety and what he says in that boat is law' (Dennis, RNLI Senior Manager). Traditional power, the basis of which was rooted in long-established customs, habits and social structures, also conferred legitimate authority on the coxswain:

You were told at the start when we were training 'this is the boss'…[you know not to challenge it because] it's ingrained in you. When a guy comes in here you tell him 'look, this is the structure of the thing'. (Pat, Mechanic)

Although charisma is difficult to define, its validity is based on its recognition by the leader's followers[9] (Shamir, 1991; Shamir et al., 1993; Klein and House, 1995; Howell and Shamir, 2005). Volunteers spoke of their coxswains as 'being

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[9] Although space constraints occlude any deeper analysis of this point, the emerging fascinating line of research on relational leadership explores these social processes of leadership and organizing, and offers ontologically constructionist explanations of how leadership relations are produced (see Dachler and Hosking, 1995; Bradbury and Lichtenstein, 2000; Uhl-Bien, 2006).

leaders', as the embodiment of expert local knowledge and as regularly demonstrating insight and accomplishment in their task role, which would suggest that coxswains 'inspired loyalty and obedience from their followers' (Kendal et al., 2000: 438). The role of coxswain was also constructed symbolically – to be chosen for coxswain was considered an honour. In a reflection of the importance of the role in enacting successful rescues, selection for the position of coxswain was tightly controlled both at station and HQ levels. It was practically unheard of for a volunteer to even be considered for the role unless they had at least ten years experience at crew level. One participant I interviewed had recently been made coxswain of his local station. He already had twenty-seven years of service with the RNLI.

There was important rationale behind this tight selection process. HQ was critically aware of the self-determining nature of teams on the water, and knew that bureaucratic and even coercive controls were limited:

If he [the coxswain] is going to break the rules, he does it in an informed manner and he says 'this is the reason I'm doing this, I know I'm going outside the rules but I'm doing it for a reason'. Instead of just saying 'fuck it'. Because there's this line… Most of our medals are when people have gone and done something which is 'beyond' really. There's a fine line between infamy and fame. But you need the judgement and the experience to make that decision. (Dave, RNLI Senior Manager)

HQ's imperative then, was to inculculate 'judgement' into the thought patterns and role-identity of the coxswain:

> Every time you move up the ladder as it were, towards command, we say yeah you have demonstrated you can move up to the next level but actually this comes at a cost, and the cost is we need you on that course or whatever, we need to be able to be as sure as we can that you are going to lead your team properly, and be a member of the team properly, because actually when you get to the coxswain, the safety of your crew, your crews' lives depend on your decision making ability and your leadership ability, so it becomes very moral at that stage. In fact quite controlling…Our system will take an ordinary non-mariner, a volunteer, and if they have got the will, determination and the basic skills, we will turn them into the coxswain of a lifeboat over a period of time, with the right thought pattern and the right behaviour pattern, and the ability to stick to the guidelines of course etc. (Dennis, RNLI Senior Manager)

For their part, coxswains influenced volunteers' behaviour in subtle and direct ways. As the recognised legitimate expert they coached, mentored and trained volunteers, and, in what I observed, focused on developing high quality, trusting relationships (cf. Brower et al., 2000) espousing teamwork and a shared collective team identity. Volunteers expressed high levels of identification with their coxswains, and many articulated deep admiration and respect for their

seemingly unflappable calm under pressure. Whilst this would appear, at face value, to be similar to the functionalist perspective that culture is hierarchically managed and amenable to control by management's leveraging, it must be placed into context – on a shout goals were highly congruent and the clan was 'the anthesis of conflict of interest' (Leblebici, 1985:110). Arguably, though, the coxswain provided salient identity cues for volunteers in their self-construction, and adherence to norms and values created a degree of self-disciplining control, particularly for new recruits. Interactions with their leader shaped and created meaning for volunteers as normative judgements on the 'right' and 'wrong' ways to carry out tasks were referred, for the final say, to the coxswain. It appeared that the coxswain played a significant role in influencing subjective experiences and fashioning realities on the boat offshore:

> So at the station I wouldn't think that I have that much of a direct impact on them and I wouldn't want that, I think its better to have them free and easy and when you see the changes in them when you go aboard the boat you realise they are waiting for your word and they will follow that to the letter and you cant expect more of people than that and they need all the freedom they can have besides. (Seán, Coxswain)

However, this premise must be balanced with the impression that the coxswain did not appear to exert heavy 'claims' against the self of volunteers. As a result of their prior immersion in lifeboating through kinship and community links and of the bonds forged because of the dangerous working environment, the internal

worlds of volunteers were perhaps predisposed to identify with these values and norms. After six months of training, those who genuinely did not identify with the organization simply quit (an option not always available to employees who are economically tenured to their paying firm). I would argue that the culture was not necessarily 'manufactured' by coxswains but that genuine commitment on behalf of volunteers to co-constructed norms was based on psychological and affective mechanisms such as identification, pride of affiliation and a stronger moral attachment.

5.3.3 Autonomy at the sharp end

That the volunteers as a group were empowered whilst offshore was particularly significant in meaning-making. Central to the discourses of ownership, self-management, self-reliance and local expertise, which were so crucial in the construction of individual and organizational identities, was the fact that volunteers considered themselves to be self-managed and self-determining whilst on a shout:

Me: Do you think you are self-managed as a crew on a shout?

Respondent: Most certainly yes, once we are afloat we are a unit away from everybody else. That's it. We are our own people; we have to make our own decisions. They have to be informed decisions and we are on our own. Absolutely. (Seán, Coxswain)

Autonomy at the sharp end acted as a point of reference for determining volunteers' identity – the depth of commitment to each other really came alive and was what mattered most, physically and symbolically, when the boat was at sea. Adversity served as a test of this commitment (Lyndon and Zanna, 1990). This also allowed volunteers to claim a deeper meaning of the boat and service – that is, that *we* are the ones who really make rescues happen for *our* community – which in turn increased their sense of ownership of the boat and service. This formal provision for autonomy, worked into the participative control system, conveyed that the formal organization valued volunteers' contributions (Crowley, 2012, cf. Friedman, 1977) and, arguably, operated to enhance effort, pride and commitment (Cappelli and Rogovsky, 1998; Hodson, 1996, 2001). Autonomy whilst on the water was an organizational narrative identity theme which was shared by local stations and HQ:

> Well they're autonomous in as much as once that boat launches, no smart arse, including me has much…you know the success or failure of their mission is down to the people in that boat. All we can do is to give them a good station, a good boat, good training and God speed. So that's the autonomy. I'm not pulling any strings. I haven't got a coxswain ringing me up saying 'ew it's a bit windy up here, what do I do?' All we can do is to prepare them. It's like athletes really, you can get them to the starting line, get them fit, get them as well prepared and then its down to the individuals to go out there, work as a team and pull

the bunny out of the hat, or in our case the person out of the water.

(Roderick, RNLI Director)

5.3.4 Autonomy mediated by HQ's pervasive influence

Of course, there is a significant ontological difference between volunteers telling it their way and doing it their way[10] (cf. Gabriel, 1995), and Roderick's statement 'all we can do is prepare them' belies the enormous amount of training, technical and psychological, which went into an attempt to control what volunteers did, in fact, do whilst they are 'autonomous' at sea. HQ's recognition that they clearly did not have the resources to exert direct personal or supervisory control prompted their comprehensive, scrupulous and far-reaching training programmes:

> You could use a big stick but once you've gone away they will still do
> what they want, so you've got to engender them the understanding of
> the culture that they are in charge of their own destiny. (Jack, RNLI
> Manager)

Training was a fundamental feature of volunteers experience of the local station and the formal RNLI organization, and weekly training rituals were used to impart skills and techniques (and also to gauge the interest and commitment

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[10] By this I mean, following Gabriel's story-telling approach (1995), that the stories and responses which respondents told me were uniquely personal and idiosyncratic. As one respondent advised me: 'no story loses anything in the telling' (Christy, Coxswain); the stories I was told were the product of experiences, and any account of whether volunteers did, in practice, do it their way or whether they 'told it their way', or both, must take into that account the structure (i.e. training) under which realities were constructed.

levels of volunteers and their likelihood of being capable of moving upwards to some of the more specialized positions such as deputy coxswain or mechanic). I have already spoken of the ubiquitous SOPs which formed the focal point of training exercises. The constant repetition of SOPs and the positive value judgement attached to them by coxswains normalized their existence. Conversely, if the coxswain did not accept the practical value of a particular SOP, different local procedures were put in place and trained to. In this way, the training exercise became a mechanism through which certain organizational members influenced how other members were to think and feel (Kunda, 2006).

On one hand, SOPs were seen as practically useful as they facilitated mutual sensemaking (Weick, 1993; 1995; Weick et al., 2005) in the hostile environment. The correct set-up and use of each piece of equipment on the boat was, as volunteers expressed it 'SOP-ed' to the last. Each task was broken up into a numbered sequence of what action was to be taken and who was to take it, for example:

> [For] the fire drill, people on the port side get out and shut off the fire valves and the guys on the starboard side do the same and then we do a cross-check to make sure…and then the person at the back in the right hand seat will take out the salvage pump and the spare person, the mechanic, will come out and help them rig it up and get the water flowing out the deck. That's all SOPs. I couldn't see it any other way because that is the way we are trained. (Rory, Crewmember)

What is most interesting in this account is Rory's disclosure that SOPs were so institutionalized within station-level thinking that *he could not even envisage* an alternative to the prescribed 'one best way' mode of working. Clearly, there was great identification on behalf of volunteers to the substantively rational SOPs when they were seen as of assistance: 'the systems they use are good, and they are beneficial to us…the training kicks in [out there at sea]' (Mick, Second Mechanic). This suggests that at times, volunteers experienced formalized SOPs as enabling because SOPs allowed them to better master their tasks whilst reducing role stress (Adler and Borys, 1996). Supervisory guidance by coxswains was also reported by some volunteers as aiding skill development (cf. Frenkel and Sanders, 2007) through learning best practices which could also be used outside of their work with the RNLI. Although at times erring towards ambivalence, volunteers, for their part, largely embraced the training provided by HQ, which would suggest that an element of identity regulation via training impacted on how volunteers made sense of themselves:

Me: Would you say that this station is self-managed?

Respondent: No…yes… and no! How do I put this? I am not trying to talk anyone up or down. I would say it is very well managed but I would say it's all through good training from the RNLI. Like I said SOPs are down to the last. (Cathal, Crew Member)

On the other hand, outright resistance of SOPs routinely occurred offshore when volunteers felt that HQ was attempting to overly determine rescue behaviour on

the boat. I spoke earlier of Ciarán's dictate that 'he would not leave them there to get bashed on the rocks' – clearly in that instance the claim against the self was too heavy and thus the instrumental rationality of the SOP was denied, trumped by the helping identity and the perceived superior knowledge regime held locally. Indeed, the interpretation of their own actions as resistance affirmed volunteers own identities as autonomous individuals capable of making good decisions (Prasad and Prasad, 2000). If the normative control exerted by HQ through SOPs was considered ideologically out of tune with the value rationality of saving lives at sea, volunteers, mandated by the powerful coxswain, dis-identified with HQ's rules through evasion or subversion. The vernacular of family was (re) interpreted to mean, specifically and exclusively, those who were present on the lifeboat at that given time. The team on the water self-conceptualized as a bounded entity on their own. It was at sea, offshore, where these things really came to life and mattered.

5.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, in the offshore theme, I have presented the crucial change of the organizational control system, formal and informal, depending on whether the boat was at sea or on land. Ironically, at the point of production, RNLI management were physically absent, although the effects of their extensive training regime were embedded into how volunteers made sense of their work, the service and themselves. I have also argued that offshore was where the deep significance of what the RNLI service really meant and stood for came to life in the most salient ways for the operational crews of the RNLI. I have outlined how

the apparent self-determination and, to an extent, self-management, along with their belief in local expertise served to heighten volunteers' sense of commitment to each other and psychological ownership of the boat. The authority built in to the structural arrangements facilitated the unquestionable legitimate authority of the coxswain, as did authority stemming from traditional and charismatic bases. There is no question that coxswains' greatly influenced behaviour and organizing patterns whilst on a shout, but I have argued that, in doing so, they rarely if ever, exerted heavy claims on the 'self' of volunteers, suchlike as in other accounts of corporate culturalism.

This chapter, and the one preceding it, represent my findings of the controlling and autonomistic dynamics at the RNLI. For obvious reasons when tackling such a complex organization, in order to be explainable, some elements have been pragmatically simplified and abstracted to a certain degree, but I have tried to avoid any sweeping generalizations and let the voice of the respondent shine through.

The next chapter provides my analysis on what this all means and the overall story revealed by the themes.

'The unexamined life is not worth living'
Socrates (470-399 BC)

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

6.1 Introduction

The previous two chapters presented the findings of this study, organized around the themes of thick volunteering, perilous volunteering, community and offshore. This chapter interprets, analyzes and explains my empirical observations and revisits the literature in light of the empirical analysis, building up the overall story that the themes reveal about the topic. The chapter commences by making explicit and explaining in detail the theoretical framework underpinning my concept of thick volunteering. The chapter then moves to analyze and explain the implications of thick volunteering for organizational control as it is currently conceptualised in voluntary organizations. Finally, the discussion makes clear the implications of thick volunteering for meaning and organizational identity.

6.2 Who owns this lifeboat? Theoretically framing thick volunteering

What has become clear, I hope, is the sense that something very different to the traditional work-effort bargain was in action at the RNLI and characterised the relationship between volunteers and their management. In chapter two, I introduced the concept of thick volunteering to grasp the notion that the activity of volunteering for the RNLI was 'thick' in the sense of being significant and profound, and so potentially it was meaningful for the volunteers and it engendered their commitment and involvement. The meaning attached to their

volunteer activity generated and maintained volunteers' volition to *engage* in this perilous form of volunteering. Whilst the meanings attached by volunteers to their work facilitated the overarching purpose of the organization (saving lives at sea), by providing the labour necessary to do the job, meanings and identities also created tensions about how this group of people should be managed and controlled. Those who engaged in thick volunteering considered themselves the epitome of moral ownership in practice:

> [Volunteers] view that lifeboat as their boat, as far as they are concerned it's 'our' lifeboat. They talk about our lifeboat not RNLI lifeboat…so it is something that was given to them and they have taken ownership of it'. (Seán, Coxswain)

This sense of ownership and autonomy over their affairs precipitated the fact that volunteers were, in some ways, unmanageable. Of course, this could be said for almost all employees of normal organizations (Gabriel, 1995), but perhaps even more so here where the impetus for action was substantially based on voluntary behaviour, with considerably less recourse to typical economic bargaining tools. In order to advance my attempt at extending understandings of thick volunteering, the following four sections make explicit my theoretical framework.

6.2.1 Commitment and involvement

Why were those engaged in thick volunteering so committed and involved in their roles? This study has found that many dynamics – historical, current and future perceptions – influence this phenomenon. Mindful of the structure-agency duality (Giddens, 1991) and at the cost of some necessary generalization and abstraction, I have argued that a number of significant themes served to deepen the meaning of the RNLI for volunteers:

Unquestionably, danger played a significant role in enacting the kinds of social relations observable at the RNLI. Danger and risk were very much a way of life for volunteers, who placed themselves physically, psychologically and emotionally in the most taxing conditions. Perilous volunteering helps to explain the 'thickness' and ownership attached to the role. Experiencing the sharp end was reported by volunteers as operating in some *fundamental* way to bring about feelings of mutual solidarity and trust because commitment was truly tested when the boat was offshore in terrible conditions. The bond and commitment to each other went further than instrumental reciprocity, it was based on shared moral values, and this loyalty and allegiance to each other fostered a social identity which operated to connect the individual to the collective (cf. Kärreman and Alvesson, 2004). In an endless processual loop, solidarity and trust beget commitment and psychological involvement which in turn beget solidarity and trust.

Communal aspects of the RNLI's organization fostered commitment and profound involvement at a local level. That many local volunteers were part of the same blood family was not insignificant, because kinship links deepened

identification, salience and commitment, and instilled a sense of loyalty and perpetuity. Shared blood was not necessarily a prerequisite however. Caring, concern and protectiveness towards fellow volunteers shine through in this account:

> We are a family like. When you are out there you are relying on who is out there, who is coming behind you, who is near you. You are watching out for him and he is watching out for you. Everyone looks after each other. (Ross, Mechanic)

Emotional proximity to the cause was also important – what could be more meaningful, touching and heartfelt than the opportunity to save the lives of ones own family? Community acted as a repository of meaning (Cohen, 1985) as the rich intertwined familial and organizational ancestry and historical autonomy of community-based lifeboat stations also served to perpetuate a norm of community helping, whereby volunteers honoured past traditions and role models of lifeboating in their communities through their ongoing active involvement. This local production and consumption of evocative meaning was articulated by Jack, an RNLI Senior Manager, as imperative to the spirit of the organization: 'we want to keep the traditions alive; which is community spirit, community based approach to lifesaving using local people as volunteers'. Clearly, astute RNLI management were moderately aware of some of the thick, rich, temporal meanings behind volunteering.

The design of the organization, particularly its centralized/decentralized dichotomy based on whether the boat was on or off-shore arguably enhanced commitment and involvement. The knowledge that only the team on the water had the power to enact a successful rescue produced resolve and determination and fostered the perseverance which heightened involvement and strengthened commitment:

> Once we are afloat we are a unit away from everybody else. That's it. We are our own people, we have to make our own decisions. They have to be informed decisions and we are on our own. Absolutely. (Seán, Coxswain)

Volunteers clearly felt that they and others in the team *must* be committed – they had peoples' lives in their hands. It is worth noting that replete through these examples we see how the historical development of the organization including the founders' initial choices and their institutionalized traces operated as powerful dynamics which later continued to influence the modern-day status quo.

My analysis suggests, inter alia, that volunteers identified deeply with the norms of the local station, norms which upheld commitment and involvement not only as exemplars but as prerequisites for core membership. Those who joined local stations and were not so inclined tended to drop off after a couple of months, leaving behind a relatively small (fifteen to twenty core members) tight

and committed cadre who were disciplined by the influences of clan control and their unwavering commitment to each other.

6.2.2 Psychological ownership

Influencing and informed by the depth of commitment and involvement towards each other and the service, volunteers' developed a sense of *ownership* towards the lifeboat, the service it provided and, by extension, the organization. As expressed by Pierce et al. (2001) three routes to psychological ownership – controlling the target, coming to intimately know the target and investing the self in the target – emerged[1]. Each of these paths gave volunteers, individually and collectively as a team, 'feelings of ownership for the work that they do and the organization they work for' (Pierce et al., 2004: 509). It is important to note that psychological ownership worked as a group level phenomenon at the RNLI due to volunteers' shared mental models (cf. Druskat and Pescosolido, 2002; Wagner et al., 2003). By this I mean that it would have been deemed highly inappropriate and consequently would have violated a norm at station level for one volunteer,

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[1] I would take this opportunity to suggest an extension to existing frameworks of psychological ownership (Pierce et al., 2001, 2003, 2004) to include some adaptations that properly attend to the emotional aspects of psychological ownership. Clearly there were a lot of emotional processes operating as well as cognitive/psychological ones (surely, for example, the emotion of pride played a role in connecting a desired target to the self?). I do not wish to become hamstrung by a multiplicity of debates, but it is generally recognised (in the fields of cognitive, social, clinical, neurological and developmental psychology and in cognitive science e.g. Arnold, 1960; Ekman, 1992; Dolan, 2002; Haidt, 2003; Moll et al., 2005; Ochsner and Goss, 2005; Rolls, 2005; Pessoa, 2008) that cognition and emotion strongly interact and are not separate entities. Although there has been a veritable explosion of interesting and promising scholarly attention to the role and management of emotions in organization studies (some recent, excellent examples include Fineman, 2004; Coupland et al., 2008; Game, 2008 and Voronov and Vince, 2012) since the publication of Arlie Hochschilds influential 'The Managed Heart' (1983), the role of affective states in the development of psychological ownership is under researched. A theory of psychological ownership taking into account the emotional dimension potentially offers abundant explanatory power of key dynamics at, particularly, voluntary organizations, and I would suggest that further research efforts should be directed towards this topic.

even the coxswain to claim the boat over and above the collective others. The experience of RNLI volunteers suggests that all three routes to psychological ownership operated in tandem, as I will now discuss.

The first mechanism, based on possessing and controlling the target stems from a wide range of scholarly thought which suggests that 'control exercised over an object gives rise to feelings of ownership toward that object' (Pierce et al., 2001: 301; cf. McClelland, 1951; Sartre, 1969; Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981). At the conceptual core of this proposition is a sense of possession (Wilpert, 1991; Etzioni, 1991; Van Dyne and Pierce, 2004). Volunteers unquestionably exerted control over the operation of the lifeboat by mastering the machinery which was physically in their guardianship. They also asserted their jurisdiction locally through their construction and adherence to *local* collective norms and shared social beliefs. The boat and the lifesaving service they provided was experienced as having 'a close connection with the self' (Belk, 1988; Dittmar, 1992), as being psychologically tied with the self. Through processes of identification and attachment, the RNLI and what it stood for and meant came to be experienced as part of the self (cf. Prelinger, 1959).

Intimate knowledge, the second route to ownership was particularly relevant to ownership attachment by those engaged in thick volunteering. In the perilous volunteering theme, I explicated how the local knowledge so highly valued in maritime settings was exclusive to the local station and how legitimate expertise was, in a sense, 'owned' at local level by the sons-of-sons-of-sons of lifeboatmen. The coxswain in particular was regarded as the embodiment of local knowledge and by definition the rescue was enacted offshore where the

local crew performed. In a similar way, the 'community' theme described how the community of place (i.e. geographic locality) was salient in binding ownership and identity to the local community, past and present. Intimate knowledge and association with an object, person or place is related with a fusion of the self with that object, person or place (Beaglehole, 1932; Weil, 1952; Rudmin and Berry, 1987; Beggan and Brown, 1994). The physical, social and autobiographic insideness (Rowles, 1983) of volunteers was evident in the ways they articulated their embeddedness in 'home' and socially imagined (Bachalard, 1958) the local space as 'ours'. In addition, the culture within the structure of the RNLI, particularly the physical absence of RNLI management whilst the boat was offshore, allowed for a discourse of 'our boat' and 'our station' to emerge locally. In the 'offshore' theme I showed how autonomy at the sharp end was particularly significant in meaning-making. Volunteers took ownership of the boat and the service it provided. Through coming, over time, to intimately know the boat and understand the service it provided, the boat and service became expressions of the self, in the same way as Simone Weil's metaphorical gardener came to feel that the garden belonged to him after a certain period of time working in it (Weil, 1952). As Weil prophesizes, 'painful spiritual wrenches' are experienced where 'the feeling of appropriation doesn't coincide with any legally recognised proprietorship' (1952: 34). Although the lifeboat is formally vested in a trust for the local station, ultimate legal ownership remains with the institution of the RNLI.

The notion of investing 'the self' (i.e. one's concept of ones self) into the target has a particular resonance for voluntary organizations. As I have argued

throughout this thesis, the lack of a traditional wage-effort bargain means that taken for granted, normalized assumptions must be questioned in light of a different context. Pierce et al. (2001: 302) maintain 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' – even more so, I believe, in this context where there is no economic remuneration for volunteer efforts. The 'bargain' then becomes effort for symbolic reward. As Locke reasoned, one begins to experience ownership over what it is that one's labour produces, shapes or creates for the reason that one feels they own their own labour (1690). This rationale particularly resonates with the unpaid workers of the RNLI. Arguably, this is a central reason why volunteers 'claimed' the organization – they claimed its identity as a voluntary organization in an 'assertion of territoriality through ownership' (McCracken, 1986:79). Furthermore, since the RNLI's most vital point of 'production' was offshore, where the boat was autonomous, volunteers exercised higher discretion and invested 'more of their own ideas, unique knowledge and personal style' (Pierce et al., 2001: 302) into the target. Volunteers' collective self-determination stemming from their direct, comprehensive participation in decision-making whilst offshore increased their autonomy, which heightened feelings of ownership because it intensified their prospects of exercising control (cf. Parker et al., 1997). I have shown in many empirical examples how volunteers deeply invested the 'self' in tangible (time, money, labour) and intangible (values, motivations, beliefs) ways, and how this connected them to their roles. This investment of the self led to volunteers

feeling that the boat and the service it provided was an extension of the self, a part of the self, and thus owned by the self.

6.2.3 The mutual embeddedness of identity and volunteering

In this study of how work and meaning were controlled in a dangerous work environment, psychological and emotional ownership of the volunteer role was a key dynamic. As I have already argued, through their kinship and community connections, volunteers were socialized to consider the lifeboat and the service it provided as belonging to them and their community. In this way the social role identity of being a volunteer enacted through interactions with the lifeboat community became central for volunteers' understanding of the self, an empirical finding which supports a quite diversely situated collage of volunteering research (Wuthnow, 1991; Grube and Piliavin, 2000; Finkelstein et al., 2005; Laverie and McDonald, 2007). In other words, volunteering grew out of an identity, and an identity grew out of volunteering.

However, my research both extends and takes a line of departure from these studies; firstly, I propose that, in the case of the RNLI, social role identity encompasses psychological and moral ownership of the boat and the service it provides. By this I mean that part of the social role of lifeboating as perceived by others in the station was truly believing (authentically), and performing that belief that the collective group owned the boat. No previous studies have made such an explicit link between role identity and psychological and moral ownership of the service the voluntary organization provides. Secondly, departing from the, in my view, sometimes overstated affects of social role

identity, I do not view any and all voluntary action as an outcome of social role identity. I believe that more personal and individual dynamics to do with the meaning of the boat and service were at play here. The expectations of others in the form of social role behaviour certainly influenced volunteers' actions, but, simultaneously, more personal and individualistic dynamics to do with self-conceptions were also at play. What I am saying here is that whilst the narrations of identity interacted with others, it is clear that the volunteers of the RNLI also engaged in attempts to live out their individual moral identities, that is, their 'self-conception organized around a set of moral traits' (Aquino and Reed, 2002: 1424). These moral traits were a deep and relatively stable part of volunteers' self-concept and were manifested in action by volunteers (cf. Aquino and Reed, 2002, 2003; cf. Blasi, 1984; Hart et al., 1998). The reflective process of constructing their identities led volunteers to come to see the organization, into which they had invested so much of themselves (Weaver and Agle, 2002; Bolton and Reed, 2004) as partly owned by them. Their 'life story', the 'internalized and evolving cognitive structure or script that provides an individual's life with some degree of meaning and purpose' (McAdams, 2006b: 11; cf. Giddens, 1991) revolved, in large part, around the lifeboat and the demands and pleasures it conferred on them. This is perhaps what Station Chairman Ben meant when he said:

The lifeboat is first really, in front of [paid] work and everything. That's the bottom line of it…the lifeboat comes first…Saturday night if

I was going out with the wife or family and the pager would go, they

are left…we would all do it, it's not just me, it's a thing that you inherit.

Meaning was constructed within interaction, but was also embedded in the subjective view, the agency of the knower (Gray et al., 1985). The felt experience of these personal values drew volunteers to continue with the lifeboat, even after witnessing tragic and distressing events, and tied the boat and service to the self concept as a part of who volunteers felt they *really* were (cf. Watson, 1994a). This overall proposition puts forward the view that whilst volunteering was very much embedded within a communal setting and meaning, it was also a deeply personal, individual value-based activity through which volunteers came to see the service as being definitive of one's self, and through that connection, especially because volunteers were not paid for their time, as being owned by the self[2].

Those who engaged in thick, perilous volunteering deeply believed in their ownership of, not just the boat and their own roles on it, but in some diffuse sense the organization itself, encompassing what it meant and should stand for. This ownership affected a multitude of key organizational aspects, not least organizational culture, motivation, identification and socialization, and manifested in a 'discursive arena where people negotiated their identities'

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[2] By deploying both theoretical viewpoints of social role identity and narrative identity I am also suggesting here that theories used in tandem can give a fuller explanation of the dynamics at play (cf. Grey, 2012: 9). Crucially, both theories allow that 'identity is complex and composed of multiple elements' (Weaver, 2006: 346) as is supported by a wider variety of literature dealing with identity, e.g. Stryker, 1980; MacIntyre, 1981; Ricoeur, 1983; Hoelter, 1985; Deaux et al., 1995; McAdams, 1996a; Brewer and Gardner, 1996; Read and Bartkowski, 2000; Weaver and Agle, 2002; Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Humphreys and Brown, 2002; Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003; Clarke et al., 2009; Brown and Lewis, 2011.

(Kornberger and Brown, 2007: 511). One consequence of this emotional and psychological ownership was the discourse of moral legitimacy which volunteers mobilized in order to assert their version of control over management and the organization, and it is to that I now turn.

6.2.4 Moral action in practice: Volunteers mobilize legitimate moral autonomy

This section aims to reach to the very existential core of what it meant to be a volunteer in the RNLI and, in a way, represents the culmination of what, united, the empirical themes and overall story amount to. In chapters four and five I set out the thematic findings of this research – thick volunteering, perilous volunteering, community and offshore – which together provide my account of organizational life at the RNLI. These themes, *inter alia*, also comprise the reasons behind the autonomy-seeking discourses[3] of volunteers. By that I mean that my themes explain not just how, but also the reasons *why* volunteers actively sought autonomy and expressed ownership of the lifeboat, service and organization. For example, the theme of perilous volunteering explicated how claims of expert knowledge were brought into sharper focus and critically framed the relationship between stations and HQ. Perilous volunteering gave a very credible weight behind volunteers' claims to ownership, but so did HQ's international reputation for producing the best boats and equipment for volunteers. It is my hope that the themes have also shown the duality and

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[3] By 'discourses', I mean the 'set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on' (Burr, 1995: 48) that in various ways produced volunteers' versions of what it is to be to be a volunteer within the RNLI.

interplay of structure and agency (Giddens, 1991) in the composition of organizational life. Volunteers clearly drew from their understandings of existing structures for sensemaking, but their agency was obvious in the ways that that they pushed at the limits of what was socially constructed and actively sought to construct something different (Nightingale and Cromby, 1999). An example that springs to mind is the contestations over organizational identity which operated, in ways, to structure the structure – claiming their ownership of the organization was a process whereby volunteers legitimized volunteer voice and self-direction, which in turn had structural consequences and enduring power effects in the form of a turn towards more decentralised decision making.

Felt ownership of the RNLI was morally based on issues of justice, rights and fairness. Brought to bear in the context of this volunteering relationship, the most interesting aspect of philosophical concern is the *moral argument of legitimate autonomy* mobilized by volunteers. I am conscious that legitimacy is a particularly polysemous concept in organization studies[4], so, following Suchman (1995) I define legitimacy as:

> A generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are
> desirable, proper or appropriate within some socially constructed

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[4] Suchman (1995) and others such as Elsbach (1994) and Oliver (1991) point to two main divisions in legitimacy research, namely the strategic tradition (e.g. Dowling and Pfeffer, 1975; Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978; Pfeffer, 1981; Ashforth and Gibbs, 1990) which emphasizes the manageability of legitimacy, and the institutional perspective (e.g. DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Meyer and Scott, 1983; Zucker, 1987; Powell and DiMaggio, 1991; Meyer and Rowan, 1991) which examines the way that structuration dynamics penetrate the institutional field. Suchman also categorizes a term 'moral legitimacy' (1995: 1995) as a type of organizational legitimacy, and I wish to be careful here to avoid any confusion. I am speaking about volunteers strive for autonomy based on legitimizing a moral argument. Moral legitimacy for Suchman 'reflects a positive normative evaluation of the organization and its activities' (1995: cf. Parsons, 1960; Aldrich and Fiol, 1994).

system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions. (Suchman, 1995: 574;

cf. Nielsen and Rao, 1987; Ginzel et al., 1992)

Put in another way, my findings show that volunteers strongly, passionately, believed that station autonomy, in the forms of self-direction, self-management and self-rule, was a *legitimate* endeavour for their achievement, and that RNLI management, whilst they had their uses as resource providers, were not the real owners of the service. This legitimacy was tied to a moral axis which was mobilized precisely because volunteers gave their labour for free, articulated here by station chairman Ben: 'Them people [HQ] would be on serious money and they come down once in a blue moon and they have a whole lot of rules for us'.

Most of the few extant empirical accounts of the experience of volunteering begin with the concept that volunteers seek to live out their 'normative ideals of undertaking action they believe is right' (Jakimow, 2010: 553). As it expressly points to a judgement of what is 'right', and, by extension, 'good', this is perhaps the beginnings of the moral justification of volunteering. Volunteering as an expression of deeply held personal values is a stalwart of practically all volunteer motivation models and there is much reason to believe that value motivation speaks to the motives of RNLI volunteers, but that is not my primary focus here. The argument I am making is that by virtue (in the Aristotelian sense of what we do voluntarily, not what we do because we are forced to) of working in a dangerous environment for free, volunteers attained a *higher moral ground*, a moral identity which was carved out in opposition to the

paid administrators of HQ. That 'them people' (as Station Chairman Ben calls HQ) were 'on serious money' was especially significant – to volunteers it was only right, in the senses of justice and fairness, because they self-exploit for the benefit of others, that they be considered, and legitimized as, the real owners of the service, and by extension, be afforded the power to control the organization. This belief was an expression of the kind of attachment and meaning that volunteers formed and derived from their association with the RNLI.

The will for station autonomy is implicit in any reflexive[5] reading of the story I have presented here. Following Thompson and Ackroyd (1995) and Fleming and Sewell (2002) who lament the totalizing portrayal of managerial controls in many poststructuralist accounts of workplaces, I believe that the strive for autonomy manifested by volunteers of the RNLI was, amongst other things, a kind of response, a modality of resistance and opposition to managerial prerogative and privilege[6]. Resistance here took the form of jokes and humour targeted at control relations (Pollert, 1981; Linstead, 1985; Collinson, 1988; Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999), with management depicted as inhabitants of the 'Kremlin' or 'Disneyland'. This humour, played out between volunteers allowed for 'an articulation of a voice that was kept silent in normal discourse' (Korczynski, 2011: 1423; cf. Scott, 1990; Taylor and Bain, 2003). As a transgressive cultural form, humour also expressed the boundaries of the volunteer community – shared social understandings among the participants

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[5] By this, following Alvesson, (2003: 25) I mean undertaking 'conscious and consistent efforts to view the subject matter from different angles and avoid or strongly a priori privilege a single, favored angle and vocabulary'.

[6] Perhaps this was also linked to broader working life concerns. One (highly-personalized) reason for this resistance was the proliferation of what second coxswain Frank called 'MBA-speak' which was deemed by him to be far too similar to the management style at his place of employment (a multinational).

(Critchley, 2002) were a prerequisite for 'getting' the joke. Again, identities were forged along boundary lines of inclusion and exclusion. Satirizing the RNLI hierarchy as ridiculous inhabitants of a fantasy land (Disney) or a fortified central complex with single party rule (the Kremlin) had deeply resistive meanings (Grugulis, 2002; Westwood, 2004; Westwood and Rhodes, 2007) and was about reinforcing volunteers' innate autonomy and their rightful claim to ownership.

Legitimate station autonomy was also, more so than could be theorized in any waged employment context, a moral assertion in its own right. Claims to legitimate autonomy at their most basic level rested on a *morally justified conviction* – because volunteers did all the dirty work of lifeboating, and were not paid for the dangerous work they accomplished, they should have a *moral entitlement* to autonomy by virtue of their ongoing sacrifice as unpaid workers.

Most interestingly, this moral conviction worked to shift perceptions of legitimate authority away from what is usually, on balance, management in 'normal' organizations, to the collective body of volunteers, and embodied particularly by the coxswain whilst the boat was offshore. This is quite a profound insight, as it flies in the face of much managerially-focused literature which assumes, a priori, the dominance of managements' platform of legitimate authority. In the context of the RNLI, when the formal organization was experienced by volunteers as too controlling, over-bearing or authoritarian, volunteers asserted their moral authority as the owners of the service as both a right and a response by devaluing management as a social referent (Helin and Sandström, 2010) and reframing their common understanding of formal

management as merely resource providers. By doing so, volunteers maintained the dignity and pride which was crucial to their identification with the organization.

Having now set out the theoretical framework of thick volunteering, the remainder of this chapter moves on to discuss consequences for the social construction of meaning, control and organizational identity at the RNLI.

6.3 The implications of thick volunteering for organizational control

I have already stated how the development of theory in the context of nonprofit, charitable organizations has significantly lagged behind theoretical understandings based on normal, economically-focused organizations, and especially more so in the specific milieu of normative organizations who place their volunteers in the line of danger. Together with my findings chapters, my forerunning section both frames this chapter and indeed provides the most significant contribution of this thesis – by developing and extending theory, that is 'a statement of concepts and their interrelationships that shows how and/or why a phenomenon occurs' (Corley and Gioia, 2011: 12, cf. Gioia and Pitre, 1990), about thick volunteering, I aim to improve understandings of management and organizations. By, as Huff puts it 'starting a new conversation' (2000: 288) about thick volunteering and its consequences for volunteer organizations, my aim is also to contribute to an ongoing and very prescient conversation in organization studies, that of the dynamic, processual achievement of control and autonomy. By contextualizing (Rosseau and Fried, 2001) this theory in the under-researched area of perilous volunteering, it is

hoped that 'thick volunteering' theory will guide research towards crucial questions (Van de Ven, 1989) which offer the promise of 'a novel approach to integrating prior thought and research' (Corley and Gioia, 2011: 19). The remainder of this chapter elaborates on these questions: how did hierarchical cultural control play out in the context of thick volunteering? How were local meanings constructed and how were those engaged in thick volunteering controlled at station level? And, what does thick volunteering mean for organizational meaning and organizational identity?

6.3.1 Thick volunteering and hierarchical cultural control

Recognising the limits of deploying bureaucratic controls alone, and perhaps driven by mimetic institutional pressures as something HQ 'ought' to do, particularly in light of the arrival of a new CEO in 2009, HQ employed a set of normative controls in an attempt to control the subjective experience of organizational members. Direct bureaucratic controls and indirect cultural controls were used in tandem at the RNLI, supporting Van Maanen and Kunda's (1989) claim that normative controls supplement, rather than replace, bureaucratic controls. Espoused norms, beliefs and values were communicated interpersonally and through documentation framing how volunteers ought to behave (a selection of which I have reproduced in chapter three). Whilst bureaucratic frameworks were used to mitigate risk, alleviate health and safety concerns, aid in best practice training, and support the coordination of the organization, the management of culture was a principal target of managerial efforts to manage both the relationship between HQ and the station, and the

ways that station personnel were to think and act away from the direct supervision of HQ.

Controlling how meaning was discursively produced was implicit in the roll-out of the vision and values statement, the volunteer commitment and the numerous training programmes, each designed to foster a set of institutionally-sanctioned norms, values and beliefs. It is worth noting that to greater and lesser extents this was synonymous with much literature on the deployment of 'culturalism' (Parker, 2000:12) in paid employment relationships (e.g. du Gay and Salaman, 1992; Kunda, 1992; Barron, 1994; Casey, 1995; Jacques, 1996). In one specific example, a highly distinguished and respected guest speaker on the Management Communication and Command training course emphasized the point that 'whereas we all have different perceptions of reality, there is only one reality' (MCC Training Session, 2011). Not surprisingly, the speaker did not elaborate on the ontological considerations of his statement, the point was to encourage participants to submit to management's version of reality, with *them* positioned as the rightful and thus, legitimate, experts in their central direction of the lifeboat service. Language, in these instances, was designed to 'construct rather than mirror' realities (Alvesson, 2003: 13).

In a more generalised sense, notions of 'family' and 'community' were mobilized by management in an attempt to engage volunteers towards accepting HQ's preferred version of the organizational identity because inconsistent perceptions about organizational identity also provided fodder for contestations (Kreutzer and Jäger, 2011). Ironically, this discourse of family in some ways worked against HQ as it tended to contradict the managerial logic of doing

'business' and allowed space for 'the villagey network' to 'sort of feed back into the organization' which was 'costing us a huge amount of money' (John, Director). Volunteers' preferred narrative organizational identity pivoted on the view 'we are a voluntary organization', and this heartfelt meaning challenged the sincerity of management's mobilization of a family discourse in light of their practice of a business-orientated philosophy. The local cultural values deeply resisted the *imposition* of 'family' as a whitewash to cure all organizational ills. Family, for volunteers, represented a different set of meanings and evoked a different set of emotions (pride, admiration, closeness, kinship, that a person was known, they understood the work of the lifeboat, in a sense already belonged and could be trusted) than those espoused by management, and was a way that volunteers confirmed their identities as members of the local station. These collective assumptions produced and reproduced volunteers' understandings of thick volunteering and legitimate autonomy.

Resistance to managerial rhetoric took the form of volunteer scepticism and cynical readings of HQ's communications and intent (Llewellyn and Harrison, 2006). Emotion played a role when volunteers' sense of justice was injured by the 'penny-wise pound-foolish' (Christy, Coxswain) administrators (cf. Gabriel, 1999; Barclay et al., 2005). The perceived ideological encroachment on volunteers' 'family' turf opened up a space to further challenge (but, interestingly, only between themselves), HQ's actual prowess at business, with volunteers citing HQ's actions as often wasteful, and engaging together in

sceptical rhetoric about the rationality of HQ's decision making concerning money[7].

What was fundamentally at stake within these cultural control efforts was the existential meaning of volunteering – what it meant to *be* a volunteer – in particular in the prescriptive terms of how volunteers should think and act, not only towards the benefactors of their rescue service, but, almost more importantly, towards their managerial 'family'. It is in this way that I mean that normative control was used in an effort to *manage the relationship* between HQ and stations, which is a line of departure from most current research on this topic which takes as its frame of reference managements' leveraging of front-line employees' interactions with their customers (e.g. Ployhart et al., 2009, 2011; Aryee et al., 2012, 2013). In this case, HQ strongly willed volunteers to identify with *them* and their version of the organizational identity (business, efficient, rule-based, money orientated). This came through rather clearly in Joseph's story of how stations were 'cleverly' informed of his having been an operational volunteer prior to landing the paid role of manager. Subtly but persuasively, HQ sought to convey the message 'we are in charge', in effect, seeking to marginalize volunteers' claims to control and ownership. As demonstrated in the example of the inspection, a level of compliance was produced ('when the inspector comes down [we] go back to the way the book is', Daragh, Coxswain), although it is difficult to pinpoint this to normative or economic control (the

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[7] My data is inconclusive on whether volunteers openly voiced concerns to management about the way funds were spent. A very interesting line of research on cynical resistance (set in paid employment relationships) argues that cynicism actually works to reproduce the very power relations which it ideologically seeks to change, because although employees baulk at cultural prescriptions, they practice and comply with the corporate rituals nonetheless (Fleming and Spicer, 2003; cf. Žižek, 1989; du Gay and Salaman, 1992). Further data collection would be required to empirically analyze this in the case of the RNLI.

obvious requirement for resources). An important distinction here is that either way, normative control may have been conducive to compliance (when the inspector comes down 'we do it his way then!' Ben, Station Chairman), or at the least, it quelled the direct voicing of dissent ('even though we are volunteers and we can tell [the inspector] to get lost, we don't do that', Ben, Station Chairman) but normative control *did not* construct conviction or belief in the minds of volunteers ('there are a few things in their rules and regulations that are a load of shite' Daragh, Coxswain). Although they still practiced the ritual of the inspection and performed for the inspector, volunteers privately resisted the imposition of managerial logic. In other words they dis-identified with their proscribed roles of obedient volunteers even though they still performed them (cf. Fleming and Spicer, 2003: 160). The play-out of the inspection also shows how volunteers used distance through the 'devaluation of social referents' (Helin and Sandström, 2010: 595) to place themselves outside power relations. Their approach of 'as soon as they're gone, we'll go back to our own way' was volunteers way of strengthening their own identity and negating the power of management, or in other words, of expressing 'they don't matter' and 'really we are in charge here'. However, by conforming to the demands of the inspection, volunteers arguably inadvertently legitimized it. Although they may have baulked at managements' cultural prescriptions, in the main, volunteers still practised and complied with them (cf. Fleming and Spicer, 2003).

The irony inherent in management's roll out of culture management was that volunteers were already completely committed to the provision of an outstanding local lifeboat service. The meaning and significance attached,

cognitively and affectively, to their volunteering led to individuals' understanding volunteering as identity work, a major part of who they are, and led them to take psychological and emotional ownership of the boat and the service it provided. Their commitment was evidenced not only by respondents' moral code of 'drown you may, but go you must' (Pat, Mechanic), but also by operational statistics and peer recognition[8]. Most culture management literature stresses a lack of dedication and commitment on behalf of front-line employees as the grounds for establishing cultural control. Here, culture was quite clearly something that management did not want to deconstruct – management's target was instead to mould volunteers into more acquiescent subjects who would behave according to HQ's version of responsible autonomy. Unlike much culture management literature (e.g. in paid employment relationships: Kunda, 1992; Hales, 1993; Willmott, 1993; Casey, 1995; Parker, 2000; in volunteer literature: Barnes and Sharpe, 2009; Nichols and Ojala, 2009; Marshall and Taniguchi, 2012; Bider et al., 2013), my research finds that managerial efforts were targeted more towards pulling back autonomy from committed volunteers than pursuing the desire to trust volunteers with responsible autonomy. For managers of volunteer organizations, can *too much* volunteer commitment be a bad thing?

For their part, volunteers largely recognised deliberate managerial interventions into their psychological and affective subjectivities. Instead of submitting the self to the formal organization, their commitment was, first and foremost, to each other. Given the potential consequences of engaging in

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[8] The RNLI are 'recognised as one of the most efficient lifeboat services in the world' by the International Life Saving Federation (ILSF, 2013), the world authority for drowning prevention, lifesaving and lifesaving sport who are accredited by the International Olympic Committee and the World Health Organization.

perilous volunteering, danger and adversity (Brickman, 1987; Lydon and Zanna, 1990) bonded volunteers together psychologically and affectively. Commitment to the 'real' family of the station, driven also by emotional proximity to the cause, most guided and regulated volunteers' actions, thoughts and behaviours. This 'we-ness' and 'communion' (Kanter, 1968) was greatly influenced by kinship and bonds of solidarity and trust embedded in meaningful local norms. To have experienced the sharp end was particularly significant. Management's attempts to symbolically lever culture by fostering a particular type of identity and 'colonising the affective domain' (Willmott, 1993: 517) were thus recognised as more overtly 'the act of management' than in other accounts (e.g. Willmott, 1993; Hales, 1993; Casey, 1995), and in the main[9] were largely withstood. Although they were reluctant to candidly voice their resistance, volunteers certainly did not act as cultural dopes (Keep, 1989; Hill, 1995), and managerial discourses, particularly the business narrative of the organizational identity were challenged, signifying that volunteers did achieve personal agency away from their administrator's power practices (cf. Gabriel, 1999). Those engaged in thick volunteering proved that their cultural space was certainly not 'a vacuum into which management could pour whatever attributes and emotions it desired' (Grugulis et al., 2000: 98; cf. Anthony, 1994).

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[9] I have qualified this statement because what is defined as an attempt at culture management is very much open to interpretation and debate. Training, for example, was positively embraced by virtually all respondents. This does not necessarily represent a seduction or domination of the volunteer psyche, mostly likely, role demands required volunteers to be technically trained to appropriate levels (e.g. in navigation, radio communications, first aid, machinery). Actively participating in and taking responsibility for one's training was seen as a developmental matter because successful completion of training would allow volunteers to better master their tasks. The MCC course I spoke of was available only to small numbers of station management and thus penetration of perceptual training was very low.

Investigating resistance in voluntary organizations is a potentially fruitful line of new research which presupposes a different theoretical basis than Marxist class-orientated resistance to exploitation of labour by capital (Marx, 1976). As Edwards et al. (1995) and more latterly (and with great skill), Fleming and Sewell (2002) have asserted, not all resistance takes place between the class-warriors and the capitalists. Accounts of resistance at the RNLI were 'more than just an expression of a subaltern or antagonistic class position' (Courpasson et al., 2012: 801). In this study, the meanings behind my themes of thick volunteering, perilous volunteering, community and offshore acted as forces for autonomy, and formed the basis of volunteers' resistance on higher moral ground. The 'feeling of being "done too" which is out there' (Eithne, Director) operated as an offence to volunteers' pride and dignity as legitimate experts in their own field. Interestingly, there is some evidence in this study to suggest that RNLI managers colluded in certain forms of resistance, for example in the inspection where inspectors gave informal notice and turned a blind eye. Perhaps this was necessitated by the requirement to keep those engaged in thick volunteering on side.

6.3.2 Implications for the construction of local meanings and control

The theorization of thick volunteering which I presented at the beginning of this chapter is an effort towards achieving a 'situational understanding of the meaning systems at play' (Fleming and Sturdy, 2011: 183, cf. Van Maanen, 1988) within the RNLI. The question now is what were the implications of thick volunteering for meaning and control at local station level? In order to unravel

this complexity, theorizations of clan control (Ouchi, 1979, 1980; Alvesson and Lindkvist, 1993; Kirsch et al., 2010) are particularly useful for analysing how meaning was discursively produced and enacted at station level. My close analysis of the responses of research participants showed that clan control operated with significant effect on volunteers, that is, that commitment to the shared values of the group and collective felt ownership of the boat knowingly or unknowingly impacted the construction of realities volunteers' lived by. Whilst performing their voluntary work, the system of values and norms to which volunteers identified, the meaning system at play, was undoubtedly that which was constructed at intra-station level, mutually fostered through the interactions of station members. What is most significant is that individuals, once members of the local station, displayed a *willingness* to allow others in the station to influence their behaviour. As I will now explicate, clan control helps to explain this strong, shared belief system which greatly and directly impacted how work was organized and controlled.

Firstly, goals and values were reported to be largely congruent amongst members: 'the core values are the same no matter who you are…you are not there because you have to be there, you are there because you want to be there' (Conor, Mechanic). That volunteers were motivated to belong to the station 'for the right reasons' (to help and not for self-glorification) was considered crucial in the eyes of peers, which is consistent with the findings of Lois (1999). Such common values and beliefs indicated, and to an extent, facilitated the existence of a deep level of *shared understandings* as to what the organization was about and what constituted proper behaviour (Ouchi, 1979, 1980; Dick, 2005). To

behave appropriately was to indicate acceptance and understanding of the mutual meaning system; to behave in a way that was deemed deviant would violate group norms.

Secondly, it is clear that volunteers displayed solidarity and regularity in their relations with each other (cf. Ouchi, 1979, 1980). This is especially evident in Cathal's articulation: 'the culture here would be let no man down, you are part of a team' (Cathal, Crew Member). Thirdly, as I set out in great detail in chapter five, members' interactions were based on shared information, trust (cf. Boisot and Child, 1988), and the concept of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960). Lastly, legitimate authority, stemming from three bases of power – rational-legal, traditional and charisma (Weber, 1978) – was apparent in the complete acceptance of the coxswain as an organizational leader. The net affect of clan control was that it worked to self-discipline volunteers – behaviour became very much attuned to group norms and values. One limitation of prior research on clan control is that extant theorizations do not account for *how* clan control mobilizes. The next few paragraphs attempt at expanding current theory and consider how these shared understandings, which self- disciplined volunteers came about in the stations of the RNLI.

It is important to note that clan control is sometimes theorized as a process of socialization (Ouchi, 1980; Egri and Herman, 2000; Turner and Makhija, 2006), a proposition that the current study partially supports. Socialization is defined as 'the acquisition of a set of role behaviours, the development of work skills and abilities and adjustment to the work group's norms and values' (Feldman, 1981: 309). Perrone et al. claim that socialization

serves as an effective control mechanism within clan cultures as 'members come to accept the organization's goals as their own' (2003: 427). Without being overly deterministic, I have argued that socialization to the tacit interpretive frames of the local RNLI usually began for young potential volunteers within the family unit prior to coming of age for formal membership. This extra-organizational aspect is quite unusual within organizational research[10], as value-indoctrination and the perceived volunteer identity were greatly influenced by familial and communal ties to the local lifeboat, past, present and future. In instances where respondents spoke of being 'born and bred' into the lifeboat, it became clear that, in effect, the process of socialization to the organization commenced *prior* to formal membership. What this meant in practical terms is that volunteers had already formed some expectations and internalized (O'Reilly and Chatman, 1996) some salient core local belief structures, particularly about the roles that certain members were expected to play.

The acceptance of role behaviours offers some explanatory power as to how group norms were constructed. In chapter three (section 3.1.3) I outlined the roles of key station personnel. In a sense, the bureaucratic requirements of HQ manifested through an insistence that role positions were strictly adhered to actually enabled (Adler and Borys, 1996) norm development because the prescription of key roles aided team members to hone their expectations of others and themselves (cf. Katz and Kahn, 1978; Perrone et al., 2003). Crucially, volunteers expressed beliefs that their interactions and overall synchronization as

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[10] There are a couple of exceptions: Ezzamel et al. (2001) who find that identity concepts derived from non-work images of self (e.g. family, friends, consumption) structured false compliance in an organization implementing new management techniques; Meyerson (2003) also finds that wider social identity markers feed into the authentic self.

a unit were immensely guided by the role structure onboard. Chaos was turned into nomos because role constraints made behaviour more consistent (Barber, 1983; Barley, 1990), facilitating mutual sensemaking as each individual enacted the role they were *expected* to play. So for example, the coxswain was 'in total charge, and their word [was] the final command' (Seán, Coxswain) when the boat was offshore. The mechanic looked after the machinery. Crew members were delegated specific roles, for example deck hand/ navigator/ radio operator, and this facilitated the establishment of group norms of behaviour. These norms were sacrosanct and any behavioural transgression was communicated to the violator.

Whilst not disagreeing in principle with Tsui et al. (1995) who maintain that roles are strategically interpreted by role members, I found that the process by which roles emerged at the RNLI spoke more to 'role taking' than 'role making' (Graen, 1976). Individuals became custodians of the role (Van Maanen and Schein, 1979) and, supporting the work of Griffin (1987) and Griffin and McMahon (1994), the role constraints placed limits on the decision-making latitude and behaviour of the incumbent; this became part of the accepted norms. So, that a collective team of individuals engaging in thick volunteering were able to develop a shared sense of norms must also be understood as an expression of their adherence to their distinct roles. In this way, my view differs with Das and Teng's assertion that within clans 'people can ultimately determine their own behaviour' (1998: 502). Not so in the local stations of the RNLI, where behaviour was shaped by socialization and meaning was created and sustained by role expectations and, as I will now explain, trust in fellow volunteers.

An important aspect of allowing ones self to come under the control of the group was the extent to which volunteers trusted each other – quite literally with their lives. I define trust here as a willingness to be vulnerable 'based on positive expectations of the intentions or behaviour of another' (Rosseau et al., 1998: 395). Volunteers did not believe they had any reason to distrust their colleagues, as is signalled in Cathal's statement: 'all the intentions [of others in the station] are good, rock solid' (Cathal, Crew Member). As I have explained, volunteers experienced psychological membership of a collective community of considerable shared history and shared interests. Undoubtedly, the feelings of 'we-ness' and solidarity (Kanter, 1968; Barnard, 1968) reported by volunteers were directly related to experiencing the propensity to trust. The affective context of group membership enabled trust development amongst its members (Williams, 2001), as individuals demonstrated caring, protective concern towards each other. I have argued that experienced trust or ability to trust fellow volunteers had many enabling effects (cf. Dirks and Ferrin, 2001), including accentuating group tightness and collective team identification by heightening the emotional significance that members attached to their membership of the team (Van der Vegt and Bunderson, 2005). In this way, trust was a contributing factor to volunteers' agency in willingly allowing others to influence their behaviour – it was part of the meaning system to which volunteers subscribed and became morally bound, as is evident in Brendan's response:

I have to be one hundred percent clear in my mind that that guy coming behind me [on the boat] will give his life to save mine. There has to be

a huge level of trust, has to be. If you don't have that level of trust you

can't work as a team. You have to have that level of trust.   (Brendan,

Crew Member)

There is also vast evidence in my study to suggest that trust was an organizing

principle at RNLI station level (cf. Zander and Kogut, 1995; Adler, 2001;

McEvily et al., 2003). Volunteers, as interdependent actors, relied on each other

in this uncertain, dangerous environment, and trust was a heuristic by which

coordination could be achieved. If all members believed that each member's

intentions were good, then relinquishing some personal autonomy for the good

of the group was not problematic. My research supports McEvily et al.'s views

that trust is most closely related to the clan organizing principle, and that it

'frequently operates in conjunction with other organizing principles' (2003: 92),

namely in this case, authority; specifically, the legitimate authority of the

coxswain. Arguably this is why the selection procedure for coxswains was so

linked to their tenure; since trustworthiness, defined as 'being worthy of having

trust placed in one' (Barney and Hansen, 1994:175), was a future expectation

rooted in past performance (Colquitt et al., 2011). Potential coxswains had to

earn the trust of those engaged in thick volunteering prior to selection for the

role. In this way, trust facilitated the forming of group norms to which everyone

subscribed, even though it meant yielding individual will.

The 'identity rewards' (Brower and Abolafia, 1997: 305) in adopting,

adapting to, or otherwise accepting the shared norms were numerous. Volunteers

collective sense of team identity fulfilled needs for belongingness and affiliation.

Many volunteers emphatically expressed the pride, self-enhancement and self-esteem benefits that membership conferred. Behaviours that were consistent with group expectations, values and norms were rewarded (Fortado, 1994) by the bestowal of symbolic rewards, for example transition from being regarded as a peripheral group member to a core group member (Lois, 1999). The identity of 'lifeboat man' (or, less frequently, 'lifeboat woman') was perceived to be very attractive (cf. Anteby, 2008) both for the inner self and also vis-à-vis the respect and kudos achieved by 'lifeboat men' within the local community. Becoming a lifeboat man, in many respects, was an attractive, desirable identity, in the eyes of both the self and others (cf. Anteby, 2008; Swann et al., 2002; Farmer and Aguinus, 2005). This line of thought suggests that volunteers certainly were not *forced* to locally 'play an organizational persona' or 'slavishly conform to uniform values' as Fleming and Sturdy (2011: 195) so figuratively put it, rather, it indicates that volunteers were usually quite content to co-produce a moral code which was binding on them all.

Simultaneously however the 'stick' was occasionally mobilized horizontally by senior members of the station (those with long tenure, coxswains, LOM's and/or mechanics) if they felt that volunteers were ambiguous in their commitment to the thick volunteering clan and the clan's identity. Punishments in the form of social sanctions were levelled against members who violated normative expectations because this threatened the group's social integrity (cf. Cohen, 1966; Gibbs, 1981; Ekland-Olson, 1982; Westphal and Kanna, 2003):

There is a culture within the station that those of us who are more senior in the place won't let that [interpersonal problems] develop because we will take someone aside and have a chat. If they have overstepped the mark we have a serious talk and, generally speaking, sort things out that way. We have an unwritten policy at this station that we don't like things to escalate that we have to call in one of the inspectors to resolve it. We like to deal with problems at the station. (Phil, Crew Member)

Sorting things out in this way was a conscious effort to reassert group social control (Hechter, 1987). Likewise, laterally within the group, there was low tolerance for deviation from group norms (Gelfand et al., 2006):

Well I tell you the truth, if there was someone acting the Mickey in the crew, the crew would turn around as quick as anybody…they would know quick enough that they are out of line with the rest of the crew, you know? (Christy, Coxswain)

It is clear from the above accounts that individuals risked losing their legitimacy (Roberts, 2005) if their commitment was somehow called into question. In an interesting line of social psychology research, Mulder (2008) and colleagues (Mulder et al., 2009) examined how external incentives (punishments or rewards) affected individuals moral concerns about behaviour. They found that 'punishment seems to be a more successful in fostering a *morality based*

motivation for behaviour than rewards' (Mulder, 2008: 1441, emphasis added), because the threat of punishment meant that a particular behaviour was 'more' wrong than if there were not a punishment consequence for it. Interdisciplinary research shows that violating a norm works to propose a challenge to the understanding of the moral value of that norm as attached to it by a given community. Punishment was a way to reassert the norm as 'right' and of legitimate moral value (Tyler and Boeckman, 1997; Darley and Pittman, 2003; Jackson and Sunshine, 2007). Breaking an injunctive norm (Reno et al., 2003; Cialdini et al., 2006) and being served with a punishment was likely to be very meaningful to volunteers, because the reprimand was a very blatant message that one had violated the group's moral code. Given the brotherhood ethos of the station, it stands to reason that volunteers' were particularly motivated to achieve social approval. Unsuspectingly breaking a norm was perhaps even worse than knowingly transgressing, as it signalled an ignorance of the very moral code which defined membership. Altogether, this account suggests a double tension for volunteers, who were controlled by station management and also controlled by their very own commitment to thick volunteering.

6.4 Implications for meaning and organizational identity

It would be a truism to state that if volunteers did not identify with the organization in some significant way then thick volunteering would not occur and volunteers would be highly unlikely to continue with perilous volunteering. Furthermore, that volunteers willingly allowed themselves to come under the control of group norms suggests that, in some way, actors either adapted their

individual identity to match the perceived (local) organizational identity (as has been found in some empirical studies, for example Pratt, 2000; Zilber, 2002; Foreman and Whetten, 2002), or that perhaps some volunteers were more authentically inclined to identify with the local organization – volunteering is often theorized as an opportunity to live ones values and express a core aspect of the self (Wuthnow, 1991; Reich, 2000; Haski-Leventhal and Cnaan, 2009) and there is little to suggest that station leaders impeded this personal goal. This section discusses the mechanisms by which those engaged in thick volunteering identified with the RNLI and the implications of thick volunteering for organizational identity.

6.4.1 Authenticity

The concept of authenticity apropos thick volunteering merits some discussion here. The human drive for authenticity and the potential for tension between this and organizational control has become a major research focus in organization studies (Hochschild, 1979, 1983; Kahn, 1990; Thoits, 1991; Kets de Vries, 2001; Seligman, 2002; Grandey, 2003; Collinson, 2003; Seligman et al., 2005; Roberts, 2005; Melamed et al., 2006; Harding, 2007; Costas and Fleming, 2009; Menard and Brunet, 2011; Fleming and Sturdy, 2011; Costas and Taheri, 2012; Westwood and Johnston, 2012). Authenticity, defined as 'the unobstructed operation of one's true, or core, self in one's daily enterprise' (Kernis, 2003: 13) is thought to be a central, if not predominant, route to self-fulfilment for individuals (Guignon, 2004). In order to achieve authenticity, individuals must align their internal experiences with their external expressions (Cable et al.,

2013; cf. Avolio and Gardner, 2005; Wood et al., 2008; Roberts, 2013). Bearing this in mind, it makes little sense for volunteers to remain within an organization which regularly puts their lives in peril, for no financial reward, if they do not authentically feel that their membership of the organization is part of who they 'really' are, especially since much research finds that inauthenticity causes emotional exhaustion, upset and life dissatisfaction (Seligman, 2002; Seligman et al., 2005; Melamed et al., 2006), which makes 'employees' more likely to quit (Wright and Cropanzano, 1998; Maslach et al., 2001; Garman et al., 2002; Taris, 2006). I would propose that the likelihood of quitting would be increased more so in the case of volunteers, who accrue no financial benefits and already report suffering from emotional distress and anxiety because of the nature of some aspects of the work (for example recovering dead bodies). Volunteers who experience a lack of congruence between the expression of their inner 'authentic' values and what is deemed acceptable by the organization (peers or management) would be very likely to withdraw from the relationship because they feel that they are not understood (cf. Rogers, 1951; Swann, 1990; Swann et al., 2004). Therefore, I propose that the maintenance of a thick volunteering relationship with the RNLI is experienced as the expression of the authentic self for volunteers. Costas and Fleming (2009) draw on Tracy and Trethewey's (2005) persuasive and erudite supposition that 'authenticity emerges from the collage of discourses that people feel best renders their biographical and existential situation' (2009: 357). Given, as I demonstrated in chapter five, the salience of community (particularly kinship, family and community of place) as a repository of meaning for volunteers, the current research supports their claim.

The distinction of whether or not volunteers authentically identified with the local station is crucial here because willingly allowing their behaviours to be guided by the norms and values of the local station suggests a state where 'actions, thoughts and feelings [were] …restrained, moulded and guided', not as Gabriel (1999: 186) demarcates, outside the individual, but rather, that the drive to be a regular member of the group (Kirsch, 2010) was internally motivated and derived from their authentic identification with the work group. I have already stated how interactions with the work group did not appear to exert heavy claims on the self, and this is perhaps what Second Coxswain Peter meant when he said 'you go out to sea, and you are risking your life, but at the same time you are happy at it'. Identification with the RNLI was a complex matter however, and made more so by the existence of conflicting, multiple organizational identities, as I will now discuss.

6.4.2 Identification and conflicting, multiple organizational identities

Organizational identity, defined as 'members' shared beliefs about what is central, distinctive and enduring about the organization' (Albert and Whetten, 1985: 263) was particularly influential in terms of any sense of collective framing about what the organization was and stood for. Crucially, identity narratives went *deeper* than just 'who we are' – they were more so representations about the *meaning* of the organization, the boat and the service that volunteers provided. The emphasis on shared beliefs is problematic here. A shared sense of what was distinctive and enduring appeared to have been crystallized and institutionalized and was very much tied to the organization's

mission statement of saving lives at sea. However, judgement on the centrality of volunteers' vis-à-vis this mission appeared to create tensions in light of the business discourse which was emerging. My research suggests that identity *claims* about the organization were made by both management and volunteers, and whilst each group shared some element of the 'truth' of the other perspective, conflict emerged when one view was emphasized to the detriment of the other. Due to these multiple, different and often polysemous narratives, and the ontological and methodological complexities of how to know them, I would concur with Brown (2006) that organizational identity is best conceived as 'the totality of collective identity-relevant narratives authored by participants' (*ibid*, p. 735).

Analogous to Kreutzer and Jäger's (2011) findings within a voluntary organization, the RNLI was characterized by multiple, conflicting organizational identities. This is a focal and important finding, because what is at stake in identity contestations is the organizations collective sense of 'who we are', and all the adjunctive power effects which arise from legitimating one meaning over competing meanings. Those engaged in thick voluntering emphatically believed that the service was, first and foremost, a voluntary organization, community-based, where imperative expert knowledge resided locally. HQ's sensegiving, the discourse it provided in an effort to guide and shape understandings (Humphreys and Brown, 2002a; Vough, 2012) revolved around framing the RNLI as a business – efficient, rule-based and money orientated. This is perhaps the only arena in which profound conflicts of interest materialized. 'Business' and 'volunteering' were interpreted as opposing ideologies and reconciliations of

the two were extremely difficult (cf. Saunders and McClellan, 2012). By symbolically assessing 'business' as more valuable than volunteers, management inadvertently devalued the volunteer effort and compromised the integrity of the 'thick volunteering' identity. This was interpreted by volunteers as a change too far – based on the extensive history of voluntary action in the RNLI, any discourse which negated the centrality of volunteers was perceived as out-of-character (Douglas, 1987) for the organization and provoked volunteers' subjective recalcitrance. Social uncertainty (Hogg, 2000; Reid and Hogg, 2005) resulted because the changing narratives about organizational identity upset volunteers' identification patterns and their sense of what their volunteering was all about. Volunteers increasingly resented the reconstruction of the organizational identity away from a personal, caring, and community-focused group to a business-like, multinational, rationalized corporation:

[for me] ah it's very much for the local lifeboat. Oh absolutely yeah. I would not…I would cut me left testicle off, I absolutely could not…they're a horrible shower! There's a, and this is the thing, and for God's sake don't put my name to this…they're gone so corporate now. The RNLI in my history, they've lost the personal touch, you know…and unfortunately that's the way that business is now and that's the way that big organizations have to push. They have lost the personal touch. Absolutely without a shadow of a doubt. When I joined you'd a small group of people and the director knew who you were, and it was very personal. It's moved now into this multi-national thing…. And

unfortunately…you know some guys would not necessarily be exposed

to that, I just…it happens that I am. And it turns me off. (Frank,

Coxswain)

It is significant that the vast majority of participants, whilst not as forcefully as

Frank, narrated their experiences of the RNLI in the dyadic terms of 'us' and

'them'. The rhetoric of opposites used by respondents – station versus HQ,

volunteer as opposed to paid worker – showed that individuals categorised

themselves and others into conceptually meaningful groups (Hornstein, 1976;

Gephart, 1993; Simon et al., 2000). Supporting much research on identification

in paid employment (van Knippenberg and van Schie, 2000; Riketta and van

Dick, 2005; Bartels et al., 2006; van Dick et al., 2008), my research found that

volunteers identified more strongly with proximal targets (their direct co-

workers and teams) than more distant targets (HQ and divisional HQ).

Identification for volunteers was primarily with the work group, and local

stations, through their collective norms, exerted clan control over volunteers'

subjective thoughts about the self, others and the organization itself and the

salient meanings and value judgements attached to them.

In their interactions with the formal organization, volunteers made

various kinds of 'identity comparisons' (Foreman and Whetten, 2002: 619)

which affected their attitudes and behaviour towards the organization at all levels

(cf. Dutton and Dukerich, 1991; Dutton et al., 1994; Reger et al., 1994). This

was not exactly surprising; as has been argued by the best minds of organization

studies, sameness and difference is what culture is fundamentally all about –

'who 'we' are and who 'they' are' (Grey, 2012: 166; cf. Martin, 1992, 2002; Parker, 2000; Dupuis, 2008). An example of this was the way that volunteers constructed their identity in opposition to the paid workers at HQ: 'them people [HQ] would be on serious money and they come down once in a blue moon and they have a whole lot of rules for us (Ben, Station Chairman). Volunteers exhibited a collective identity orientation, categorically defined themselves as members of the volunteering group (Hogg and Terry, 2000; Flynn, 2005) and eagerly adopted a narrative of the organizational identity which emphasized the *voluntary* aspect of the RNLI. This narrative was what volunteers best felt 'rendered their biographical and existential situation' (Costas and Fleming, 2009: 357, cf. Tracy and Trethewey, 2005). Crucially, it also afforded them the pride and dignity of volunteer prerogative. In addition, as Ashforth and Mael (1989) and Mael and Ashforth (1992) have argued, identification was increased within the in-group because out-groups were salient – because those engaged in thick volunteering firmly situated themselves, physically and subjectively, in the social space of the station, their allegiances and commitment to the volunteer group guided their decisions and helped explain their actions (cf. Larkey and Morrill, 1995; Johnson et al., 2006).

For those engaged in thick volunteering, the volunteering activity and organization became so important and meaningful that volunteering became a defining part of the identity of the volunteer. Volunteers made sense of their volunteering as 'who you are and what you do' (Christy, Coxswain). At station level, the organization was perceived to be, above all, a voluntary organization, run by unpaid workers who were the epitome of rightful expertise and who could

therefore, morally, *legitimately,* mobilize claims of ownership to the lifeboat and service. Narratives were constructed locally through rituals and storytelling, and combined with the recruitment and selection methods used, which generally meant there was a great degree of similarity between volunteers, created and enacted meanings and realities, and homogenized experiences and values, which in a continual loop fed back and around, subjectively producing and positioning volunteers as the rightful owners of the service. Consequentially, volunteers' actions and behaviours were habitualized apropos *their concept* (or narrative) of the RNLI's organizational identity. It was this locally produced narrative organizational identity which volunteers identified with most, that is to say that the local narrative identity provided the greatest source of *meaning* for volunteers.

6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter and the two preceding chapters which informed it, which together form my analysis of control, autonomy, meaning and organizational identity within the RNLI, I have shown how control practices at the RNLI were not a matter of stable, established mechanisms but rather enduring contestations requiring negotiation and interpretation. I have sought to show how control, particularly of the normative kind, operated in different ways to other 'normal' organizations because claims to ownership of the RNLI and the service it provided, and by extension claims to autonomy in decision-making, provided the backdrop for constant tensions regarding organizational identity and the meanings that different actors constructed and attributed to the organization.

Organizational culture, in practice, was not homogenous, but rather was a dialectical process with station and management each influencing each other. By conveying a temporal sense of the organization, I hope to add weight to Trice and Beyer's assertion that 'cultures cannot be divorced from their histories and they do not arise overnight' (1993: 6). My concept of thick volunteering offers great explanatory power in understanding meanings attached to membership of the organization and the behaviours that are founded on them. I have argued that thick volunteering is indicative of a sense of psychological and emotional ownership and affective commitment towards the role and the voluntary organization, which binds the target to the self concept and led volunteers to understand their volunteering activity as a major part of their existential being. If there is an 'achievement of the self through work' (Grey, 1994: 482), thick volunteering shows that there can also be an achievement of the self through unpaid labour. This commitment and ownership, along with some structural features of the organization, propelled those engaged in thick volunteering to mobilize a discourse of legitimate moral autonomy and to enact autonomous behaviours both as a right and a response to managerial assertions of control.

> Life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards
> (Søren Kierkegaard 1813-1855)

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS: CONTROL, IDENTITY AND MEANING IN VOLUNTARY WORK

7.1 Introduction

Organization studies has almost exclusively been concerned with organizations where work is paid for. More narrowly, this is also true of specific streams of organization studies research concerned with control, autonomy, identity and meaning – which are rich and detailed in their development of these concepts, but again, only or mainly for paid work. This thesis has been an examination of what happens to these things where work is not paid for, and has paid particular attention to such questions as; what mechanisms of control were manifested by volunteer management and what were volunteer responses? What consent and negation structures were enacted by volunteers and why? How did the control and autonomy dynamic play out between the formal and the local? What were the sources of autonomy for volunteers? And, within this mode of organization where work centres on the volunteer, who controlled organizational meaning and identity, and how?

To develop answers to these questions, I have looked to the literature on volunteers and voluntary organizations. This, as I have shown, has rather little to say about control, identity and meaning, and what it does say is mainly fairly superficial, and very much focussed on individual motivation. Indeed, within this literature motivation to volunteer is studied *ad nauseam*, but rarely gets any further than the notion that individual characteristics or personalities explain

volunteering (cf. Wilson, 2012). The pattern replicated on a grander scale throughout this body of literature is that of research divided into discrete silos, which at best can only provide simplistic views. Aside from not explaining the social and contextual aspects of individual, or indeed, collective volunteering, motivation to volunteer researchers rarely explain the significance or *meaningful* aspects of volunteerism, or any potential antecedent matters which have contributed to their salience. The lived experience of organizational/organized volunteering is particularly under-researched. One contribution of this thesis was to provide a situated, empirically grounded subjective account of the meaning of volunteering for volunteers.

Lack of research in this domain is surprising, given that recent estimates suggest that forty-one percent of UK adults volunteer formally, that is 'giving unpaid help through a group, club or organization' (Institute for Volunteering Research, 2013:1). Irish best estimates suggest that thirty-eight percent of adults volunteer (World Giving Index, 2011), although it is not known definitively what percentage of Irish adults volunteer formally. Volunteering is an activity which is currently undertaken by a very large segment of the population and research clearly has not kept pace with developments in the field.. Akin to the societies in which they are embedded and interact with, groups, clubs and associations (i.e. organizations) make rules and impose structure on their members. Surely this should be of interest to organizational researchers?

This thesis seeks to speak to that space where organization studies and volunteer literature overlap, which is a currently almost vacant space. More specifically, the thesis urges the reader to recognise the variety of types (or

depths) of volunteering and in particular that these can be differentiated as to their thickness and thinness. Thick volunteering makes an especially clear contrast with paid work because by definition it is richer in meaning than thin. It is worth saying here that I do not wish to become hamstrung by seeking to categorise an infinite list of types of volunteer organizations and volunteering activity, which I would regard as a rather doomed and soulless enterprise. As Zimmeck presciently notes:

Volunteer organizations are…infinitely varied. They differ inter alia in their sectoral locations (private, government, voluntary), spheres of operation (international, national, regional, local and neighbourhood), structures (from complex to simple, from hierarchical to flat, from tight controls to loose controls), resources (from the income of a small country to no income at all), funders (from externally-funded to self-funded), cultures (from corporate to collectivist), functions or "industries", size in terms of employees, size in terms of volunteers, size in terms of members, employee/volunteer/member mix, types of clients or end users (from the robust to the sensitive and vulnerable), and types of opportunities on offer to volunteers (from total control to envelope-stuffing). (Zimmeck, 2001: 15)

In the context of this qualitative case study, I have sought to provide an in-depth understanding of human behaviour and the reasons that govern such behaviour within one such organization. Specifically, I developed themes and concepts

(thick/thin volunteering, perilous volunteering), and extended extant theory (in the areas of community, identity and the meaning of work) which help to explain *why* those engaged in thick volunteering express such high levels of commitment and involvement towards their unpaid work. Individuals created their version of the world by organizing their own understanding of it and imbuing it with meaning, and this thesis has been an attempt to analyze, in the spirit of Weber's *Verstehen*, the meanings that volunteers made of their work, their organization, and indeed, themselves. To that end, I believe that my categorization of thick and thin volunteering was a particularly useful concept by which to explain the experiences of volunteers.

More specifically still, thick volunteering was made especially thick when it consisted of perilous work. Perilous or dangerous work has occasionally been considered by organization studies (Van Maanen, 1980; Weick, 1993; Dick, 2005; Thornbarrow and Brown, 2009; Colquitt et al., 2011) but again, normally when it is paid-for work. So there is a further intersection – this thesis is at the meeting point of organization studies (control, identity, meaning), volunteering (thick) and peril. To look at this particular space I have considered an illustrative, extreme case, that of the RNLI, 'precisely because it is very special in the sense of allowing one to gain certain insights that other organizations would not be able to provide' (Siggelkow, 2007: 20). By looking there, where those things to do with the wage relationship and compulsion were stripped out, I have sought to enhance, expand and refresh theory through the medium of providing an empirically grounded subjective account of how

individuals and groups negotiated and performed together to create the realities and social orders they lived by.

The specific question now becomes: what does this tell us about what happens in this space, the meeting point where organization studies (control, identity, meaning), volunteering (thick) and peril overlap? In this final chapter I commence by drawing together the lateral themes, key findings and contributions of this research, showing why the research matters and what has been achieved. I then discuss the limitations of the research and consider how these could pave the way for further research opportunities. The overall thesis concludes with my final thoughts on why this matters for organization studies and how this context provides numerous opportunities for the research of work and organizations and, possibly, the renewal of organization studies.

7.2 Key findings and contributions of the research

At the most general level, this research has provided a subjective account of situational understandings of the meaning systems at play within the RNLI and how these understandings structured the relationship and influenced the construction of social order between unpaid workers and their (mostly) paid management. The four themes of thick volunteering, perilous volunteering, community and offshore have substantially aided understanding in this regard. The study has found that the significance of the volunteering activity and the import actors cognitively and affectively attached to it were fundamentally meaning-making processes which influenced a breadth of individual and organizational consequences as well as shaping managerial attempts to

legitimate managerial activities. The type of involvement (unconventional participation in a stress-generating work environment where risk was assumed by the volunteer) and degree of commitment (high-commitment sustained volunteer work where the volunteer assumed potential costs) (cf. Britton, 1991) expressed by volunteers towards their work and their organization made for an unusual empirical site, and all the more so because those normal things to do with wage relationships and compulsion were stripped out. I have introduced the concept of thick volunteering in an attempt to capture the idea of a form of volunteering activity which has sufficient significance and meaning as to make it possible for those undertaking it to gain a sense of identity from it. Thick volunteering as an identity project led volunteers to experience feelings of ownership over the volunteering role and indeed the organization itself.

What became especially clear was that members' self- and organizational-understandings were hugely informed by the dynamics of organizational autonomy and control. This held good not just for the unpaid volunteers, but also for paid management who found themselves constantly negotiating control and pushing at the boundaries of what would be perceived as legitimate, credible and acceptable for management/HQ to do in practice. Contested ideological beliefs at the RNLI centred on four critical narrative claims: who controls this organization? Who is trying to speak for whom and for what? Who is the rightful expert? And, who owns this lifeboat? These tensions arose mainly due to competing claims of what it *meant* to be a volunteer - for volunteers, volunteering was a deep-rooted narrative of the self (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002), an identity project embedded within individual and communal

interpretations of self-identity. In their collective view, the voluntary aspect of the organizational identity was especially crucial because volunteers risked their lives at the 'sharp end' of rescues. In an attempt to capture this dynamic, I developed the sociological concept of perilous volunteering to denote volunteering activities whereby the volunteer, by personal volition and having some prior regard to the risks that may be at stake, choose to engage in dangerous activities which may have resulted in serious and/or significant personal bodily or emotional harm or distress, up to and including loss of life.

The dangerous working environment whilst offshore added particular weight to volunteers' moral claims of ownership of the boat and the service it provided. Volunteers placed themselves physically, psychologically and emotionally in extraordinarily testing conditions and although the boat was legally owned by the RNLI, it was to a great extent seen by the volunteer crew as belonging to them, and in a more diffuse, but still meaningful sense, to the local community both past and present. One consequence of the immense emotional and psychological ownership was the discourse of moral legitimacy which volunteers mobilized in order to assert their version of control over management and the organization.

For their part, HQ mobilized a rational-legal discourse emphasizing their legitimacy with regards to the provision of the service, which was based on their worldview that volunteers formed a set of human resources at HQ's disposal. Through their provision of excellent equipment, boats and backup service, HQ constructed their own version of expert knowledge. Yet those engaged in thick volunteering sought to negate the bureaucratic and coercive tendencies of HQ,

challenged the ways that these forms of control drew on discourses of managerial expertise and actively sought autonomy in their role and the functions of the local station. The widespread adoption of the techniques of managing paid staff, including the formalization of bureaucratic structures and rules, was resisted in subtle yet effective ways by local volunteers.

I deployed the theme of community as the specific construct through which to investigate meaning and identity. Chapter five in particular set out the peculiar mix of locality, kinship, communal relations, geography, history, tradition, custom and the spirit of neighbourly self-reliance which were all embedded into the formal and informal organization of the RNLI. Kin relationships added an unusual texture because this extra-organizational source of meaning wove together family and work ties. Notions of family, used as a discursive device (Edwards and Potter, 1992) were mobilized to build different, polyphonic emplotments of the story of the RNLI (Boje, 2001). For those engaged in thick volunteering, family signified the steadfast devotion and commitment which made possible the mutual pride, closeness, trust, respect and camaraderie which bonded crew members together and made individuals feel they were part of a team. Family in this meaning worked in ways against HQ as it negated the managerial prerogative and seemingly slowed down organizational decision making. By exploring the divergent meanings in the discourse of family and the different uses of the rhetoric of family, this study has contributed to organizational research by building an understanding of family as a polyphonic, dynamic and contested rather than static concept.

Using Rowles's (1983) research on three complimentary senses of insideness (physical, social and autobiographical) I showed how the emotional and subjective attachment people had to particular locales enabled the production and consumption of meanings (Tyler, 2011). Discursive mobilizations of expert knowledge drew heavily on physical insideness, and a significant contribution of this thesis has been an exposition of what happens when people who already have strongly held values are inserted into a normative organization, which is a reversal of the usual focus of culture management studies.

In this context, as in other high reliability contexts (e.g. Weick et al., 1999; Bigley and Roberts, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2011) trust was found to be an important source of meaning, which was undoubtedly linked to an experiential understanding of the difficult working conditions. The values of trust and solidarity came to symbolize what the organization stood for and meant, and became internalized as volunteers constructed the self in tune with identifying with the organization. In this way, trust and solidarity also worked to self-discipline members as they came to feel that they must personally be trustworthy by managing their skills so that they could act responsibly in life-and-death situations. This is an extension of the theory developed in Lois (1999), who shows the socialization practices of a mountain rescue team but does not explore in such depth the self-discipline which resulted.

The final theme, offshore, emphasized the analytic distinction of whether the boat was on- or offshore. The work on the water was completely different to the work on land (cf. Barley and Kunda, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2011) and the

structures of power within the organization, formal and informal, were dramatically altered once the lifeboat was launched. I outlined how the apparent self-determination (although mediated by HQ's pervasive influence) along with volunteers' belief in local expertise served to heighten volunteers' sense of commitment to each other and feelings of psychological and affective ownership towards the boat and service. Offshore was salient in constructing volunteers' versions of what it is to be an operational volunteer within the RNLI.

The next four subsections present in detail the most significant findings and contributions of my empirical research.

7.2.1. Control and resistance operate independently of the wage relationship

An important contribution of this thesis was to illuminate the theoretical debate of how control operated when workers were unpaid. Specifically, the thesis has found that control and resistance operated independently of the wage relationship, and it has also shown how they operated. It is important to note here that the distinction of who was waged and who was not were analytical categories and are not and cannot always be watertight – the same people were occasionally involved in both cases, for example the mechanic who was contracted and paid for forty hours of the week and who at all other times was a volunteer giving his time for free. In any case, volunteers were (economically) controlled by their requirement for expensive resources (the lifeboat, essential equipment and running costs), and as part of this transaction they were expected to submit to management's version of how the service should run. Control here was manifested in a bureaucratic system of rules, standard operating procedures,

hierarchy and training – the latter of which, occasionally, became totalizing in its effects. For example crewmember Rory, on being asked about a particular operating procedure, stated 'I couldn't see it any other way because that is the way we are trained'. Rory's assertion brings to mind Berger and Luckman's seminal text on the role of the expert in shaping institutional reality:

> One does certain things not because they work, but because they are right – right, that is, in terms of the ultimate definitions of reality promulgated by the universal experts. (Berger and Luckman, 1966: 118)

Furthermore, the study tells us something about the nature of inserting volunteers who already have strong values into a normative organization – managerially espoused normative controls may have been conducive to compliance but they did not construct conviction or belief in the minds of volunteers, a point which was especially evidenced in volunteer resistance. For example in the ritual of the inspection, volunteers played the role of cooperative subjects whilst the inspector did his rounds, but once the inspector left, things went back to normal.

Accounts of resistance at the RNLI were 'more than just an expression of a subaltern or antagonistic class position' (Courpasson et al., 2012: 801). In this study, the meanings behind my themes of thick volunteering, perilous volunteering, community and offshore acted as forces for volunteer autonomy, and formed the basis of volunteers' resistance on higher moral ground. The

'feeling of being done to which is out there' (Eithne, Director) operated as an offence to volunteers' pride and dignity as legitimate experts in their own field. Interestingly, there is some evidence in this study to suggest that RNLI managers colluded in certain forms of resistance, for example in the inspection where inspectors gave informal notice and turned a blind eye to non standard-issue volunteer kit. Perhaps this was necessitated by the requirement to keep those engaged in thick volunteering on side. By investigating resistance in a novel empirical setting, this study has also addressed Courpasson et al.'s (2012) call for research into how resistance can operate on the power configuration of organizations.

Elements of coercive control were also in evidence within the RNLI and were constituted in discourse and interaction by management and volunteers. To illustrate this argument more fully, it is instructive to give an account of the balance of power as an organizational dynamic between HQ and local stations. In their role as the body responsible for centrally directing and resourcing lifeboat stations, management controlled the threat of displacement or replacement of a volunteer, a crew, the boat (for example downgrading a station with a smaller boat) or the entire station. Such an act would be a very obvious expression of coercive control. HQ's legitimate authority stemmed from their standpoint that they must be efficient (or, as some sceptics argued, they must be seen to be efficient) in the use of the donations entrusted to them. Management were also in a position of power with regards to volunteer careers, given their ability to control access to the key resources of the training process.

As for volunteers, an obvious observation was their control over the stations' output in terms of the quality and quantity of actual rescues and the knowledge that the replacement of some 4,600 volunteer crew members by paid staff would be wholly unfeasible; it was on this basis that volunteers derived their power. Opportunities for volunteers to mobilize coercive control included taking advantage of HQ's obvious vulnerability, up to and including the potentially catastrophic threat of staging a walkout. Although there have been incidences where individuals or small groups of volunteers have left stations due to grievances, in the 185 year history of the RNLI there has never been a wide-scale walkout. Nevertheless, it remains a theoretical possibility.

The coercive control system in use here relied on the motivation of the volunteer to remain a part of the RNLI, for this was the prime incentive that could be removed at HQ's discretion, yet was balanced out by the countervailing pressure, knowledge that wholesale replacement of crews and stations would be impossible. This is what I mean by refuting Cnaan and Cascio (1998) and Farmer and Fedor's (2001) assertions that coercive control plays no part in the situational dynamics of voluntary organizations, and I have argued that it is experienced and manifests in subtle yet complex ways. This means that the perceived threat of punishment became 'real' in its performance on the behaviour of both volunteers and management as the organization mutually negotiated roles, responsibilities and ownership. Thus this research is also a contribution to the literature on coercive control, showing how it can operate in unusual, counter-intuitive circumstances.

The paradox in thick volunteering was that, by definition, volunteers join organizations of their own volition as an opportunity to live their values, but at no stage was volunteering experienced as 'I do what I like' – on the contrary, volunteers were often subjected to a version of management similar to that within a paying employment relationship. Control thus operated, in many ways, independently of the wage relationship, and volunteers had to submit to the collective will, surrender some individual and station autonomy and allow themselves to be controlled by RNLI management. In other words, the managerial control agenda was evidenced even within thick volunteering.

This research is also a contribution to the literatures of cultural and clan control respectively. The literature on cultural control is almost entirely about the shaping or moulding of values by management, and whereas here there was obviously some of that going on, the dynamic was much more about what it meant to insert individuals who already held strong values. This can also be true of ordinary organizations, and certainly recruitment is focused on matching values, but here in volunteering it was particularly strong because the only motive was commitment to the activity. In other 'ordinary' cases, even if fully attuned to values, it is still the case that individuals are 'ultimately' working for money.

What was perhaps most significant was the nature of the clan controls which operated to self-discipline volunteers. Rather than just operating in different ways to normal organizations, strength and depth was the feature of this dynamic. The clan/crew/boat effectively became a point of resistance to HQ/managerially espoused cultural controls. Furthermore, I found that the

meanings inherent in the themes of thick volunteering, perilous volunteering, community and offshore acted as forces for autonomy, but this autonomy was largely mediated by clan control, and particularly the influence of the coxswain. Volunteers were controlled by station management and the clan control which was binding on them all, and they were also controlled by their commitment to thick volunteering. In the first six-month period probationer volunteers were socialized into the local station and a part of this was to accept and, indeed, live up to clan control norms. One definite manifestation of these norms was the absolute absence of any dissent directed towards the coxswain. Of course the authority of the coxswain was dependent on acceptance of his authority by other volunteers, and this appears to have been universal. Coxswains, however, did not seem to exert particularly heavy claims against the 'self' of volunteers, who, perhaps as a result of their prior immersion in lifeboating through kinship and community links, were predisposed to identify with these specified values and norms. In other words, this is part of the way in which community was enacted – the local station excluded those who were deemed unsuitable and the reason why this was so uncontested was because those who did not fit in were weeded-out. The co-construction of a shared belief system was thus relatively simple amongst a group of like-minded, homogenous, individuals.

7.2.2 The nature of work in the absence of the wage-labour relationship

Following on from the above analysis, the current study tells us that the wage relationship is not the only source of power dynamic that resides in organizations – which may sound patently obvious, but it is rare to find a case where this can

be observed empirically. By opening up an analytical space where I have effectively isolated off the wage variable, the study contributes to providing deeper understandings of how individuals construct and enact meanings in organizational settings. This research is a contribution to the research call of Barley and Kunda (2001) to 'bring work back in', and did so by bringing into focus the work itself (of both volunteers and management), and exploring the social relations which enabled the institution to achieve their purpose of saving lives at sea. The specific point of relevance to organization studies of this line of reasoning is that work and organizing are so interdependent and thus the nature of the actual work undertaken has far-reaching consequences (cf. Bechky, 2011).

Voluntary work at the RNLI was, crucially, not a means to an end of securing a profit or a wage as understood in Marxist analysis. For those engaged in thick volunteering, the work itself was about providing a sense of meaning, grounding and belonging. Volunteer respondents spoke passionately of being incredibly proud of their stations and their teams, and of the immense personal satisfaction, confidence in their own abilities, and positive self-development they gained from working with the RNLI. My substantive point is that work here existed independently of capitalism, employment and the economic cycle – which is a marked distinction to most other empirical research in the organization studies tradition which has, at its core (although seldom explicitly acknowledged) the necessity of employment/labour as its key theoretical assumption. Throughout this thesis and embedded within the empirical observations on which it is founded, work at the RNLI had a certain purity which was, distinctly, work.

The necessity of labour, once a thriving breeding ground for political philosophical thought has become so taken for granted within organization studies as to be practically invisible. Within the wage relationship the organization obviously needs workers or else it ceases to function and exist, but labour as a philosophical movement is always curtailed by the fact that humans need to work in order to live – this is the most basic premise of Marx's (1976) capitalist mode of production and of Hannah Arendt's (1958) concerns with the prioritization of the economic. By isolating off the wage dynamic, the case of the RNLI enables us to revisit classic texts about the meaning of *work* (as distinct to other human activities) and explore how the work of the volunteers of the RNLI fits or otherwise with their precepts. This study thus contributes by calling into question Marxist accounts which are only about wage-labour relations and thus only make sense if people are paid (Braverman, 1974; Burawoy, 1979, 1985; Knights and Willmott, 1990). Seeking explanations from an exclusively Marxian perspective is therefore limited.

Hannah Arendt, whose thought is particularly salient to this research due to her phenomenological orientation of privileging the *experiential* character of human life and being-in-the-world, attempts to show how the crucial political events of her time (1906-1975), particularly the Second World War, affect our categories of moral and political judgement. In doing so, Arendt makes the fundamental distinction between work and labour more visible in her categorization of a tripartite *vita activa*. The *vita activa*, 'human life in so far as it is actively engaged in doing something' (1958: 22), is split by Arendt into the discrete categories of labour, work and action. For Arendt, work stands in clear

distinction from labour in a number of ways. She tells how, in ancient Greek civilization:

> The labor of our body which is necessitated by its needs is slavish…to labor meant to be enslaved by necessity, and this enslavement was inherent in the conditions of human life…[yet] what men [sic] share with all other forms of animal life was not considered to be human. (Arendt, 1958: 83-84)

In labour, humanity is categorized by Arendt as '*animal laborans*'. Labour creates nothing of permanence, and its efforts are quickly consumed, thus 'to labour meant to be enslaved by necessity' (*ibid*, p. 83). For this reason, the Greeks considered humanity in this mode as closest to animals, and thus, the least human. Because of this characterization, Arendt is highly critical of Marx's elevation of animal laborans 'to a position of primacy in his vision of the highest ends of human existence' (Yar, 2001: 2). Labour and its effects, she argues, unlike work, do not possess the semi-permanence which is 'necessary for a shared environment and common heritage which endures between people and across time' (Yar, 2001: 2, cf. Arendt, 1958). By contrast, work for Arendt (1958: 7) is:

> The activity which corresponds to the unnaturalness of human existence, which is not embedded in, and whose mortality is not compensated by, the species' ever-recurring life-cycle

Work thus corresponds to the fabrication of artificial things which endure in time beyond the act of creation itself and humanity in this mode is cast as *homo faber*. Because work is regulated by human ends and intentions, '*homo faber* is indeed a lord and master …because he is a master of himself and his doings' (Arendt, 1958: 144). In this mastery comes a certain quality of freedom which is absent from labour, governed as it is by necessity. *Homo faber* is considered more sophisticated than *animal laboran* because 'work and its product, the human artifact, bestow a measure of permanence and durability upon the futility of mortal life and the fleeting character of human time' (1958: 8).

This is what I mean by my understanding of voluntary work at the RNLI having a particular distinction and purity which is work as distinct from labour. Work has a purpose, a usefulness: 'it is "for the sake of" usefulness in general that *homo faber* judges and does everything in terms of "in order to"' (*ibid*, p. 154), which is absent from labour's grounding in necessity. Since voluntary work, and especially that of the 'thick' variety is, in Arendt's terms, work and not labour, the case of the RNLI suggests that there may be some transformation of the typical relations of power in the context of this work. Perhaps Arendt's erudite distinction also provides an explanation for the existence of the moral contestations which characterised organizing practices between management and those engaged in thick volunteering at the RNLI. As I have shown, discourses of moral legitimacy, and moral stories which involved 'concerns about the social position of the self (and others) including issues of rights, duties, obligations, responsibility and potential blame' (Whittle and Mueller, 2012: 114; cf. Harré and Van Langenhove, 1999; Van Langenhove and Harré, 1999) became, not

merely mutually perceived and acknowledged, as in other cases where work is remunerated, but central and focal discourses, influencing action, behaviour and organizational ways of interpreting what was legitimate and rightful. By perhaps taking a misguided *a priori* view of volunteers as *animal laboran* instead of *homo faber*, management disregarded the primacy of the essential volunteer freedom, articulated here by second coxswain Frank: 'I'm in a very strong position, because they need me more than I need them'. By opening up this analytical space in order to consider how people create and enact meaning in organizational settings and more specifically, through their (voluntary) work, this study has contributed to deeper understandings of the nature of work when money is not involved.

7.2.3 Volunteering means more than the individual voluntary action: it is structured, and for thick volunteering, richly so

The next key contribution of this research is primarily concerned with the development of a more sophisticated and nuanced volunteering literature, and is also a contribution to the long-standing debate within social sciences about the nature and extent of agency and its analytic polarization with structure. By that latter point, I mean that recognising that volunteering means much more than just the individual voluntary action goes to the heart of the debate on the interplay between social structure and agency. Organization theory and sociology has long recognised the importance of social structure in shaping the behaviours and outcomes of social actors (Giddens, 1979, 1984, 1991; Archer,

1988, 2000, 2003[1]). However, in volunteering literature the role of structure is, more often than not, denied, or at best, mentioned in passing. For volunteering literature and theory to become a meaningful lens through which to contribute to the study of organizations and social science, it must begin to consider the ways in which structural relations 'affect, and are affected by, the subjective meanings of human beings' (Keat and Urry, 1982: 174).

Interestingly (and frustratingly) most researchers of volunteering appear to completely under-determine the role of structure, with individual characteristics and dispositions frequently supposed to explain, especially, motivation to volunteer (e.g. Clary and Snyder, 1991; Clary et al., 1998; Bekkers, 2005; Atkins et al., 2005; Einolf, 2009; Omoto et al., 2010). It is true that a steadily growing literature examines the social stratification of volunteers, seeking to identify determinants of inclusion or exclusion in volunteer participation based on economic status, gender, race, immigration status, work status, education and income (e.g. Wilson and Musick, 1997a, 1997b; Musick et al., 2000; Morrow-Howell et al., 2003; Sundeen et al., 2009; Blackstone, 2009; Eagly, 2009; Brand, 2010; Einolf, 2010; Lee and Brudney, 2010; Taniguchi, 2011). But in general terms, these studies are based on wide-scale survey data and focus on quantitative variables. The epistemological and ontological perspectives underpinning those studies thus differ greatly from the current study whose purpose is to provide a constructionist social-scientific account of the *meanings* of particular elements of structure, and *how* these meanings influence

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[1] Archer and Giddens, both eminent sociologists, differ in their perspectives. Briefly, Archer argues that where structure and agency are seen as being co-constitutive, as in Giddens's structuration theory, the possibility of sociological analytical exploration of the relative influence of each aspect is occluded.

behaviour, as understood by volunteers. The studies cited above provide positivist demographic findings but very little in the way of analysis as to what this all means for volunteers and volunteering. In short, there are very few systematic attempts to go beyond the individual-level perspective (cf. Simon et al., 2000). The current study is one such effort, and its contribution to especially, the volunteering literature, is that it particularly highlights the role of structure as a determinant of individual action.

What this research enables me to say is that there was a great degree of structuring, even though I stripped out those things to do with the wage relation and compulsion. Social forces configured individuals to do things and act in certain ways; in this case to volunteer in the first instance, remain volunteering for a long period of time even after witnessing traumatic events, negate the formal rationality of bureaucratic management and control, challenge managerialist discourses etc., and I have argued that these phenomena were inherently related to the thickness of the volunteering and the level of commitment and solidarity amongst volunteers. Structuring here, such as tradition and community, partly determined what was available to individuals (e.g. who would be accepted into a station as a recruit), and the very fact of availability structured the choices that individuals could make. In other words, the act of volunteering occurred not just within, but, in part, because of the relations around it – it was embedded in some way. Perhaps the most obvious contextual element was that of the institution of the family (or more generally, community) and its influence on the recruitment and selection of volunteers. Volunteering for the RNLI traditionally occurred within 'the bonds of we'

(Hornstein, 1976: 62) and social and familial ties within the community of place suggest that volunteering for the RNLI was somewhat expected of, particularly, men, of a certain age. This was almost certainly historically informed, especially within tight-knit fishing communities where the same individual could be an RNLI volunteer one day and a potential recipient of the RNLI's help the next. What this example also shows is the importance of history in organizational analysis, and of taking into account tradition and custom, which seems to me to be almost inseparable from providing credible, grounded accounts of organizational life.

Things to do with the structuring of, particularly, history, community and family, helped to explore the fundamental question of identity. A way of answering that was through identification – an individual can only be a particular thing if recognised by others as being that thing. As Kunda, drawing on such diverse theorists as Durkheim (1933), Freud (1961), Goffman (1961), Mead (1964) and Hughes (1968), puts it:

> …self and society stand in a dialectical relationship: how one sees, thinks, and feels about the social world and one's own place in it is the outcome of a continuing dialogue with the representatives of the social order into which one is born, its various forms of social organization, and the ready-made roles they offer. (2006:161)

Put in similar terms by Stryker: 'to the degree that one's relationships to specified sets of other persons depend on being a particular kind of person, one

is committed to being that kind of person' (1980: 61). Of course being a volunteer was not the only identity these individuals had – many were involved in the sea in other ways and obviously had other ways of thinking about themselves – but the case of the RNLI was a remarkable one in that many of volunteers' central group memberships converged at this point in time and space. Individuals may have as many self-conceptualizations as they have group memberships (Tajfel, 1981, 1982), but it is salient that generic key memberships – family, community, locality, friendships and connection with the sea coalesced at the point of membership of the local station of the RNLI. In the accounts of volunteers it was undeniable that, at the core of selfhood and identity, defining their meaning and purpose (Gabriel, 1999) was the moral ownership of the lifeboat and the service it provided – to those engaged in thick volunteering, the lifeboat was not just "what we do", it was emphatically "who we are". Furthermore, if structure is conceptualised as social forces which constrain what the agent is free to choose, what I am saying here is that the choices were limited because the social pressure to volunteer and remain volunteering was strong. Additionally, while the choice may have been about many things, it was certainly not about money, and thus this is different to other occupational identities.

My study, and particularly my concept of thick volunteering as a socially conditioned identity project, is both a challenge of, and a contribution to, a volunteering literature which currently does not feature such forceful, detailed and deep accounts of, *inter alia*, the interplay between structure and agency. The powerful vignette I provided in section 4.3.1 on perilous volunteering further

underscores this point. To deny the social forces which clearly influenced the son of the man who had died on Christmas Eve to subsequently join the lifeboat, and indeed for the local lifeboat station to accept him as a legitimate volunteer, is to deny all concepts of homage and belonging and to negate the effects of structural influence.

The study also enables me to say something about the nature of structure (and this is especially borne out in the empirical material of this research), that is, that the effects of structure were dynamic, with changes over time and place, and a certain precariousness given the particular context. For this reason, structure cannot very well always explain or predict what choices people will make. The example of the making, adhering to and breaking of RNLI SOPs especially highlights this point. By following the rules of the institution (e.g. the SOPs which, incidentally, focus groups consisting of volunteers had some input in designing) volunteers existed within and reproduced these rules. To some individuals at some points in time, SOPs become all-encompassing mental models; for example Crewmember Rory said: 'I couldn't see it any other way because that is the way we are trained'. By reproducing the rule through its repetition and routine use, and thus establishing it as a particular way of doing things, the correct application of a SOP became what constituted normal behaviour (cf. Garfinkel, 1967). But this did not hold good for all contexts – agency played a role where the individual felt they had to 'do what you think [is right] on the night… get into it, get the job done' (Ben, Station Chairman). For example in Ciarán's account it became clear that structure was not enough to

hold back individual agency, which in itself, was possibly structured by the mutually-held moral order of the crew physically on the boat:

> Ok well lets say there was a boat going up on the rocks and it was a force seven [wind] and the big boat [ALB] can't get in towards the rocks and there are four lads on the boat and you knew they were going to drown and get bashed into the rocks, and you have the daughter boat on top and its only allowed to go out in a force four…you are not going to say 'I am going to leave them there and get bashed on the rocks'…but that would be a [SOP] governed thing. (Ciarán, Crew Member)

Agency here shaped the structure – the established way of doing things in terms of the rules were changed when people ignored them, replaced them or reproduced them differently. The prescriptive ensemble of the rules did not fully determine individuals mode of being or their response to institutionalised demands (Foucault, 1986). Thus this study has made a contribution to this debate, showing that 'structure-agency is not an either/or but a both/and' (Grey, 2005:31, cf. Giddens, 1984).

In conclusion of this section, it is important to iterate that what I have discussed above is based solely on my interpretations of a particular case, that of the RNLI, and as I outlined in chapter three (section 3.2.5) I do not claim generalization on the basis of this case alone. However, it is an unusual case from which there is potentially a lot to learn, not only about this organization and

the practices and social realities within it, but also about how we study organizations and what assumptions we make whilst doing so. As the material of my research has especially borne out, seemingly individual decisions were greatly influenced by structure even though volunteering was supposedly about free choice. This research has shown that the action of volunteering occurred not just or merely from forces within (agency) but also because of the relations around the activity (structure), or in other words, volunteering was embedded in some way and the fact of the volunteering grew out of a whole set of pre-existing relationships – the institution of family, moral codes, history, tradition, community, and the very existence of the institution of the RNLI etc. So we see here the constant interplay of agency and structure (Giddens, 1984), where action reproduced structure (by volunteering for the RNLI the individual kept the institution of the RNLI running), and structure shaped and influenced action (the rules and guidelines of the RNLI in part determined what was acceptable and legitimate action to take). Looking at voluntary organizations in this manner contributes to a richer understanding of the social practices and the negotiation of realities within them.

Volunteering at the RNLI was also structured or contextualised by the dangerous working environment, a topic which neither organization studies nor the volunteering literature explains very well, and it is that I now turn to discuss.

7.2.4. The relationship between danger and meaning

In numerous places throughout this thesis, most especially in my theme of perilous volunteering (section 4.3), I have implied that danger in some way made

the activity of volunteering more 'real' or 'authentic' for those engaged in thick volunteering. Indeed, I have argued that thick volunteering itself was made especially thick when it consisted of perilous work. Whilst acknowledging the difficult nature of this claim, particularly its exposure to criticism that it may be founded on an element of romanticization on my part, it is a claim which is intuitively plausible, and to me, having strived to be reflexive (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000) in my analysis of the empirical data and my presentation of this story of the RNLI, appears to be true. What I am presenting here is a particular inflection of what work meant when it was conducted within a dangerous environment and what volunteering in this context meant, which is a contribution to the meaning of work, identification and volunteering literatures I have already discussed. It is also a contribution to a potential 'dangerous work literature' which I have argued for in other sections of this thesis.

I have claimed that danger played a significant role in enacting the kinds of social relations observed at the RNLI. The types of dangers potentially encountered by volunteers were physical, mental and emotional in nature, and often volunteers were subjected to all three simultaneously:

If you are going out in difficult conditions in high waves and high seas and it's dark, that's the sort of things that will really test guys because you can't see what is coming at you and you are getting thrown around the place. (George, Second Coxswain)

I have argued that experience of working in these dangerous and testing conditions bonded volunteers together and increased the levels of solidarity, togetherness and we-ness (Kanter, 1968) within the team in some fundamental way. Commitment to the station 'family', driven by emotional proximity to the cause (in which danger played a meaningful role) most guided and regulated volunteers' actions, thoughts and behaviours. As Crewmember Ciarán expressed:

> These people that you are working with, that you are with every day, you are out on shouts with, that you are put into danger along with, go on rescues, they are like a family, that's as much as you can say

The solidarities and empathy fostered led to the building of interpersonal trust, which, as Giddens recognises, is 'a fundamental means of dealing psychologically with risks that could paralyse action or lead to dread and anxiety' (1991: 3). This point is a minor contribution to the cultural-symbolic approach to risk which suggests that research should focus on 'how risks are made relevant to important aspects of social organization' (Gephart et al., 2009: 144, cf. Douglas, 1985, 1987, 1992). Risk and danger faced together by crews was certainly different to risk and danger faced alone, and this study has shown an alternative to individualistic approaches to risk, and also tells us something about the nature of danger when faced collectively than when faced alone. On that latter point, and following on from the previous section, danger perhaps structured action because within the team there was more pressure to be brave,

but it was also easier to be brave within the collective. The team context is important here because there is no real comparative material within organization studies. The fact of being part of a team and as a part of that, having to trust the team with one's life can help researchers understand the profoundness in identification. In this context, what it meant to really belong was to trust and to be trusted.

The dangerous work environment gave an extra dimension to the volunteering because of the high stakes involved. Even leaving aside the volunteering aspect for a moment, arguably the meanings would not have been so profound but for the dual possibilities of saving life whilst dealing with the possibility of losing one's own life. Very few other occupations have to deal with this dilemma on a regular basis and this is another reason why the RNLI is such an unusual organization. Doctors of course save lives but in doing so they do not normally put their own lives at peril. Police work and fire-fighting are perhaps a bit closer. It is difficult to think of many other cases where there is both danger and volunteering – voluntary mountain or cave rescue work, or some kinds of charitable work in dangerous countries perhaps, but certainly there are not many other examples. The 'thickness', I have argued, in volunteering for the RNLI is related to this entwined possibility of saving lives whilst potentially losing life, and this is a particular inflection of what work meant in these circumstances. My contribution here is not so much to the human experience of bravery and danger (although I have touched on this), the point is that the working conditions of danger, and the personal experience of what can happen when things go catastrophically wrong gave an extra dimension to the

volunteering and made it thicker and deeper. To my mind, this is especially evident in the story of bringing the lifeboat back from Poole, where the crew had

> … a meeting on the stern, a quiet moment for all that had gone … you remember the people gone before you and things like that … it is a bonding thing and everyone knows that and you know, its all part of it as well. (Christy, Coxswain)

In brief conclusion, I have argued that the dangerous working environment enacted social relations which, arguably, would not have been so profound and meaningful if not for the very real possibility of losing one's own life whist attempting to save life, which is a contribution to the meaning of work, the construction of social relations and the volunteering literatures.

7.3 Limitations and opportunities for further research

I have already mentioned (in section 3.2.2) how the focus of my research changed significantly mid-project. By this stage, the data collection phase of the research was complete, and although I had permission to revisit any of the four stations I had interviewed in, financial and practical concerns prevented me from doing so, and I did not feel that I would have been able to collect the depth data I wanted by telephone or video-conference. The semi-structured interview document I had originally used was very useful in allowing respondents to expand on the issues which they felt were most significant and meaningful (and it was because of the rich empirical material collected that I changed my original

proposal and research questions), but the document I used for data collection was not particularly attuned to other issues which arose during the analysis and write-up phase of the research. This became more evident as I tackled the question of whether local volunteers independently choose volunteering or whether their choices were structured by social expectations. I suspect the answer is a mixture of both, but a more targeted and refined data collection process would have assisted in developing these ideas further.

My data was also inconclusive on whether volunteers openly voiced concerns to management about the way funds were spent. I believe that a further ethnographic element to this research would have been able to answer this. Indeed, the case of the RNLI would have made a brilliant ethnographic research project, albeit a highly impractical one. A researcher would effectively have to live amongst the lifeboating community to have any chance of even getting on the boat in time when a shout was called (the average launch time from notification is ten minutes), and even if one did so, there is no guarantee that that particular station would actually be called on to conduct a rescue. I would also have had an ethical concern of quite literally being in the way whilst people were trying to do their vital lifesaving work, and without having any specialist knowledge of the sea or lifeboating, I would have been ill-equipped and a potential liability. Furthermore, most likely, the RNLI would not have allowed my onboard presence on an ongoing basis.

Collecting data with another topic in mind had limitations but also afforded benefits. In some aspects, as noted above, the data could have been more focussed, targeted and refined. On the other hand, because the research

questions were effectively created *after* the data had been collected, I had not run the risk of creating the answers I wanted. In this way, *a priori* assumptions were largely removed from the study. Indeed, at every stage of the research, I sought to be reflexive in my thoughts, questioning different angles and viewpoints, and making efforts not to overstate or overplay any given one (cf. Alvesson, 2003).

Theoretically, the central concepts of thick volunteering and perilous volunteering require more work. Whilst it is hoped that the findings of this research will 'start a new conversation' (Huff, 2000: 288) about these concepts, further empirical evidence is needed to support the claims raised in this research and set the conceptual borders of the definitions I have provided here. This research could possibly take the form of comparative or longitudinal studies, the former with the intent to highlight the differences between thick and 'thinner' forms of volunteering, and the latter to explain the development of teams sense of solidarity, commitment and ownership over time.

Along with the calls I have made within this research for organization studies in general to take a more proactive research agenda towards voluntary organizations (a point which I also discuss in the concluding thoughts section), and indeed for researchers of voluntary organizations to develop more nuanced views of the role of structure in explaining organization, this study has aroused other questions which unfortunately could not be addressed within the time and space constraints set.

Space constraints limited any great discussion on paternalism within the RNLI, but an interesting further study could explore the prevalence and effect of paternalistic discourses (cf. Greene et al., 2001; Knights and McCabe, 2001;

Redman and Snape, 2005; Fleming, 2005; all of which examine paid employment relationships) within high commitment voluntary organizations. Paternalism encompasses both structural and normative relations – the employer is considered to be in a mighty position of super-ordination on which the employee is profoundly dependent (Bendix, 1956). These unilateral power relations are seen to produce a moral dimension, because the relationship is justified by legitimation and an ethical component (Newby, 1977). The reliance of RNLI volunteers on HQ's tutelage and economic resources would be crucial elements here, and an interesting further study could explore this dynamic and its implications for organizing.

The extent to which normative and clan controls operate through the emotional dependence of volunteers could make a fascinating socio-psychological study. I touched on emotion in many parts of this thesis – the potential for emotional harm in perilous volunteering, the emotional significance and personal meaning of membership of the RNLI, emotional issues arising from kinship (cf. Collins and O'Regan, 2011), the emotional aspect of goodwill-based trust (cf. Colquitt et al., 2011), and the possibility of extending existing frameworks of psychological ownership (Pierce et al., 2001, 2003, 2004) to include adaptations that attend to the emotional aspects of membership (e.g. pride). At the RNLI, the coxswain in particular appeared to play a pivotal role in regulating and managing the emotions of the crew whilst on a shout and in the aftermath of tragedy, and further research could examine in depth the emotional labour of the coxswain and its affects on organizing. Interesting research is beginning to consider the role of negative emotions such as shame in work

settings (e.g. Styles, 2008) and a fitting counterbalance could examine stoicism and/or pride, particularly within dangerous work contexts.

Many issues worthy of further research emerged from the data. One such is the idea of the coxswain as 'bricoleur', improvising and creating order out of whatever presented itself. I would propose that the 'ritualized ingenuity' (Coutu, 2002:46) which is based on the bricoleur's familiarity with his environment surely contributes to the 'resilience which enables an individual or organization to overcome a crisis situation by maintaining both a coherence of identity and the capacity to act' (Duymedjian and Ruling, 2010: 135, cf. Weick, 1998). Indeed the work of coxswains in the RNLI offers a fertile ground for gaining better understanding of bricolage and resilience.

Although I did not mainline on this element within the research, the crews of the RNLI are perhaps the epitome of the extreme action team identified by Sundstrom et al. (1990) and elaborated by Klein et al. (2006). Extreme action teams are 'teams whose highly skilled members cooperate to perform urgent, unpredictable, interdependent, and highly consequential tasks while simultaneously coping with frequent changes in team composition and training their teams' novice members' (Klein et al, 2006: 590). An added dimension to this in the context of the RNLI is the possibility of losing life whilst trying to save life. Further research could use the unusual empirical ground of the RNLI to develop and extend theory in this interesting domain.

7.4 Concluding thoughts

I commenced this thesis with the lament that organization studies, whist engaging with a broad range of literatures and, at times, borrowing from a multiplicity of other domains has almost exclusively been concerned with organizations where work is paid for. More narrowly, this is also true of specific streams of management and organizations studies research which engage with control, identity and meaning, which, as almost any scholar in the field will readily agree, are central to any considerations of the management of individuals and groups. Whilst these subfields are, in parts, rich and detailed in their deployment of these concepts, the literature has become increasingly de-familiarised, abstracted and in many ways existentially impoverished (Rehn, 2008; Grey, 2009, 2012). Qualitative studies which speak to and of human experience, whilst balancing empirical and narrative richness with the development of useful theory have become less frequent, and perhaps even more marginal, and as a result many calls have been made for a rejuvenation and revival of organization studies (Weick, 1996; Starbuck, 2003; Czarniawska, 2008; Rehn, 2008; Gabriel, 2010; Suddaby et al., 2011; Grey, 2009, 2010, 2012). In some ways, this thesis has been an attempt to respond to the deficiencies of organization studies, and thus represents my effort to contribute to the revitalization of the field.

Voluntary organizations have the potential to enrich the study of organizations for reasons I will now discuss. Firstly, they provide a perhaps archetypical space in which to research the increasing 'erosion of boundaries between personal, private and work time' (Bunting, 2004: 25), being in some

ways a concatenation of all three. Secondly, because voluntary organizations are increasingly formed to fill perceived gaps in the provision of practical services where no previous organization existed, or from which the state has withdrawn, they provide excellent empirical sites for investigating organizations as 'institutions…that shape the societies that use them' (Hickson et al., 1980: 1-2, cited in Barley, 2010), the 'path not taken' in organization studies (Barley, 2010: 778). In terms of this study I am not for a moment suggesting that the RNLI is the sole explanatory force of *gemeinschaft* communal relations in their localities, but the fact that the activities of the institution invoke major consequences for the larger sociocultural context in which it is embedded cannot be denied.

I have already mentioned that a comprehensive search of the ABS four star management and organization studies journals returned just forty-nine papers in the past thirty years which report on volunteers and non-profit organizations in any manner. It is not as if such organizations are in any way 'un-researchable': the neglect would therefore seem to suggest a systematic blindness to or lack of interest in such organizations. Constructionist researchers interested in the nature of social entities will undoubtedly find plenty of interesting, engaging, remarkable evidence to support intellectual innovations deduced from observations in voluntary organizations. I would like to think that this research is one such example. Whilst I am not suggesting that researching here opens a window to see in to some pure or uncontaminated version of organizing (hermeneutic interpretation will always remain no matter how researchers concern themselves with rigour and objectivity), it potentially

broadens the range, scope and depth of the types of things organizational researchers can and should investigate.

The narrative richness so crucial to providing a readable, plausible, interesting account is largely attributable to the goodwill of the interview respondents who generously gave me their time and insight, a point which brings me along nicely to discussing methodological reasons why researchers may be interested in voluntary organizations. I was genuinely struck by the warmth, selflessness and accommodating fashion in which volunteers responded to my request for interviews. This research has taken me from Ireland to the UK and back again (numerous times), and within Ireland, from East to West coast and North to South. Whilst this has been a considerable undertaking in terms of time, travel and financial outlay, I have been greatly rewarded by the goldmine of data I collected from, especially, but not exclusively, the volunteers of the RNLI. In marked comparison with anecdotal reports from PhD colleagues, access and data collection, surely the two fundamental springboards of good research were virtually unproblematic for me (I am not being smug – I had many other issues). Actually, my experience of the difference between arranging to interview volunteers and arranging to interview management serves to emphasize my point: When I commenced this research I wrote a formal letter to the chief executive of the RNLI requesting access. After a couple of months with no reply, I realised I had erred – if the person at the top denied me access, there was no one else that I could canvass, being in the awkward situation of not having the chief executives consent. Van Maanen and Kolb's (1985) concept of access as part 'dumb luck' thankfully came into play and I was invited to Poole

for a meeting with the chief executive and a member of the executive team. The chief executive was verbally most supportive of my project and granted me access to whomever I wanted to speak to. The actual organising of interviews was done via a helpful secretary, and although some members of the executive team were repeatedly "not available" for some of the dates I would suggest, 'tenacious pestering and persuasion' (Leidner, 1993:234) eventually overcame their demurrals. At one stage I feared I had come upon a political stumbling block, as the original gate-keeper through which I was organising interviews indicated that I must distinguish between 'what you want and what you need'. The decision of what I needed, I soon realised, was to be his. Careful networking with other contacts allowed me to manage this difficulty out of the picture, though the very fact that it existed was significant. It seems to me that issues of politics, perception and image are inseparable from the study of organizations. In this case for good reason – the RNLI depends solely on the public and reputation management is a crucial legitimating activity.

In great contrast, volunteers arranged to meet me in lifeboat stations at seven in the morning and ten at night in order to facilitate my research, and for that I am deeply grateful. Although I continue to have great respect for lifeboat men and women, I tried to be reflexive in my considerations and thoughts about volunteers, and to not fall prey to 'horns and halo' foregone conclusions. There appears to be a common misconception (perhaps it was mine) that volunteers, akin to disgruntled workers, are only too delighted for an ear in which to bemoan their sorry lot. My personal experience of interviewing volunteers could not be further from this. Moreover, without wishing to come across as superior or elitist

(which the next sentence inevitably will), I was struck by how articulate, perceptive and astute my respondents were. They spoke freely, and appeared, so far as I could judge, to be speaking openly, honestly and from the heart. The RNLI is heavily skewed by gender (male), race (white), and class (working class), and I had to make a great effort not to let my own preconceptions overly taint the kinds of answers and interactions which our interviews produced.

A further more pragmatic methodological aspect of my personal experience of interviewing volunteers only serves to strengthen the case that management and organization studies could be enriched by the focus of future research attention on these types of organizations. By definition, volunteers give their time for free, and it is significant that none of my volunteers placed restrictions on the quantity of time they were prepared to give me for interviews. This is in marked contrast to the experiences of doctoral colleagues, who reported being fitted in to fifteen minute or half hour slots, where they desperately tried to get to the 'real' issues without even having the opportunity to build some rapport or ask some background questions. In saying that, I have implied that volunteers, by nature, are generous with their time, which seems to me to be a truism. As anyone who has poured over, engaged with, stressed about, and, frankly, laboured and struggled with trying to produce a plausible, credible, readable, perhaps even beautiful and useful (Watson, 1994a; Czarniawska, 2008) account of organizations which is somehow true to organizational life, and whilst doing so manages to find the balance between the distance and closeness required for good analysis (Czarniawska, 2008), the biggest hurdle is surely acquiring the empirical insights which *make possible*

good theory and literature. Right here, investigating these types of organizations and the people who comprise them, is an opportunity for organization studies to tap a very rich seam of meaningful and enlightening data.

In more personal and idiosyncratic terms, apart from there being a lot to learn about these types of organizations I have found something very meaningful and poignant about turning my attention to this kind of organization and the people who comprise it. I am very conscious that this point may come across as trite and hackneyed particularly in this era where the production and consumption of emotion within society on a grander scale seems to have become increasingly superficial (Alvesson, 2013). Be that as it may, although I have no direct familial or personal connections to the lifeboat (apart from my interview respondents), and I have never lived beside the sea or regularly observed lifeboat crews in action, I have experienced what I can only describe as my own, personal and distinctive form of deep meaning, and for this I should also be grateful.

It is also a truism that 'lost community' has become a by-word for our times here in Ireland, and by that I mean an appreciation of the simple things, the "good life" – cooperation, unity and belonging, which are, I think, especially abundant in the story I have presented here. By this, of course, I mean not in the debased sense of notions of community or 'family' being manipulated for the benefit of business (Gubrium and Holstein, 1990; Casey, 1995; Mills, 2001) or indeed in the romanticized and nostalgic images and platitudes which we Irish people and our diaspora seem especially susceptible to. In the practical, pragmatic terms of my own situation I watch family and friends depart Ireland in

droves seeking employment and the chance at a better life. As I write these words (May 2013) the Irish rate of unemployment stands stubbornly at fourteen percent (Central Statistics Office, 2013:1), the Irish government continue to uphold a now four-year long recruitment moratorium in the higher education sector (Department of Finance, 2013) and it is looking increasingly likely that I will be joining the Irish diaspora, separated from my own community of place, a place which is unquestionably a defining point of my identity and selfhood. The following quote seems to perfectly sum up the sentiment I am trying to convey, as well as showing that I am not alone in this feeling:

> The common frame is the volunteer…I think for most people it is the pull of the fact that it's got a proud tradition, that's very important. I think that matters and I think it's about what people do, the nature of people putting out to sea at a time when everyone else comes home. There is something about that that is very deep, I can't quite explain it but it's very deep, and you kind of…you know, you feel it. I think with a lot of people there is an emotional connection for sure… it kind of gets you and I think the more society becomes, I suppose, the way its moving, the more people hold onto this aspect of life, it kind of grounds you and gives you some purpose…and it actually restores your faith in people a little bit. (Eithne, Director)

As I wrote this thesis, this sense of meaning, value and purpose amongst the RNLI workers resonated with me, and I hope that, through my writing, I have been able to make it comprehensible to, and even resonant for, the reader.

APPENDIX A

Articles published in Association of Business Schools 4* rated journals (general management and organization studies) in the period 1983 – 2013 which either investigate some form of volunteering or investigate a non-profit or voluntary organization or both. Where the empirical setting is non-profit organizations, articles are only considered relevant if data was collected from volunteers as well as paid staff. Not-for-profit professional associations whose underlying interests are commercial were excluded. After much consideration, volunteers in online groups were also omitted because their activities are believed to be fundamentally different from voluntary activities requiring physical presence.

Academy of Management Journal	Carper and Litschert (1983)	A comparative analysis of intraorganizational power distribution in profit and non-profit organizations, taking the organization as the level of analysis.
	Sherman and Smith (1984)	Uses regression analysis to investigate the relationship between structural elements such as formalization, standardization and centralization and intrinsic motivation in a sample of 543 ministers and members of 44 conservative protestant churches.
	Tucker et al. (1990)	Investigates ecological dynamics and institutional changes in voluntary social service organizations, taking the organization as the level of analysis.
	Zilber (2002)	Examines the role of organization members as carriers of institutions in a non-profit rape crisis centre in Israel.
Administrative Science Quarterly	Singh et al. (1986)	Explores organizational change in a population of voluntary social services organizations.
	Singh et al. (1986)	Investigates the liability of newness and the propensity of young organizations to die in a population of voluntary social services organizations.
	Oliver (1988)	Examines three perspectives of isomorphism in voluntary social service organizations.
	Murnighan et al. (1993)	Discusses motivation to volunteer in work and non-work settings.

	Nelson and Barley (1997)	Demonstrates that the ways paid and volunteer emergency medical technicians work, talk and interact with others facilitates the development of an occupational mandate.
	Bacharach et al. (2000)	Analyzes boundary-management tactics used by flight attendants volunteering in a peer-support programme.
	Galaskiewicz et al. (2006)	Uses regression analysis to study the network growth and organizational growth of a sample of community non-profit organizations over a period of time.
	Hwang and Powell (2009)	Analyzes how professional values influence the character of non-profit organizations.
Journal of Management	Dobbins et al. (1990)	Two studies, the second being a questionnaire involving members in nine voluntary social organizations, in order to investigate the relationship between self-monitoring, gender and leader emergence.
	Farmer and Fedor (2001)	Uses regression analysis to investigate the relationship between volunteer performance and time-related role demands, social interaction and role investments in a health advocacy non-profit.
Journal of Management Studies	Wilson and Butler (1983)	Discusses strategy in the voluntary sector via four case studies of voluntary organizations.
British Journal of Management	Euske and Euske (1991)	Explicates the implications of institutional theory to the management of a non-profit organization.
	Osbourne (1997)	Investigates the relationship between local authorities and voluntary and non-profit organizations that provide social services.
	Chew and Osbourne (2009)	Explores how charitable organizations respond in terms of their strategic positioning to environmental changes. Uses two case studies of British charities that deliver public services.

	Muthuri et al. (2009)	Investigates the dynamics of employee volunteering in three UK companies.
Organization Science	Ludwig (1993)	Examines organizational adaptation to environmental change in a non-profit religious order in the U.S.
	Elsbach and Bhattacharya (2001)	Develops and tests an introductory framework of organizational disidentification by drawing on the responses of members and ex-members of a non-profit voluntary organization.
	Voss et al. (2006)	Investigates the relationship between organizational success and divergent views of organizational identity at top leadership level. Draws on data collected in 113 non-profit professional theatres.
Organization Studies	Slack and Hinings (1994)	Examines the process of isomorphic change using a population of 36 national-level sport organizations.
	Boyce (1995)	Examines the significance of stories and storytelling in a non-profit organization.
	Callahan (2002)	Interviews volunteer leaders of a not-for-profit organization and explores the ways the management and expression of emotion influence organizational action.
	Tomlinson (2005)	Analyzes how actors involved in implementing partnership in refugee community organizations construct the meaning of partnership.
	Moore and Beadle (2006)	Examines MacIntyres conceptual framework of organizational virtue in the context of a charitable organization who uses volunteer sales representatives.
	Golant and Sillince (2007)	Proposes a new approach for the study of organizational legitimacy based on empirical observations gathered at a voluntary organization.
	Desilvilya and Yassour-Borochowitz (2008)	Studies gender-role perceptions in a voluntary peace and conflict resolution organization which monitors and reports human rights violations in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.

	Randall and Munro (2010)	Analyses how a forum of mental health workers, some voluntary, make sense of their work.
	Tracey et al. (2011)	Builds on an in-depth case study of a charitable social enterprise to examine the process of bridging institutional entrepreneurship.
	Keevers et al. (2012)	Investigates the outcomes of transferring results-based accountability practices into locally-based community organizations.
Leadership Quarterly	Weed (1993)	Examines the institutional pressures on a non-profit organization to conform to rational administrative practices for its continued legitimacy.
	deHoogh et al. (2005)	Analyzes leader motives, charismatic leadership and subordinate work attitudes in two organizations, one voluntary and one for-profit.
	Plowman (2007)	Examines the actions of leaders in a non-profit church.
	Ruvio et al. (2010)	Comparative study which explores the role of entrepreneurial vision in non-profit higher education versus for-profit business in Israel.
	Bono et al. (2010)	Longitudinal field study using a sample of 1,443 volunteers which examines the determinants of volunteer involvement in community leadership.
	Redekop (2010)	Profiles two visionary, transformational leaders of the anti-nuclear weapons movement of the early 1980s.
Human Relations	Senior and Naylor (1984)	Reports the results of a study in a voluntary skills exchange for unemployed people in Liverpool, drawing on open-ended interviews with 60 participants.
	Miller et al. (1990)	Uses questionnaire data from 158 hospital volunteers to examine the relationship between personal situations, attitudes and behavioural intentions on intention to leave.
	Schaubroeck and Ganster	Uses regression analysis to investigate the factors influencing voluntary workers

	(1991)	engagement in extra role pro-social behaviour for the purposes of raising funds for their voluntary organization.
	Young (1991)	Argues that voluntary organizations which advocate for solutions to global problems are more successful when they adopt particular organizational structures and strategies.
	Lewis and Morgan (1994)	Examines the process of change in the voluntary organization Relate and argues for the need to develop a gendered understanding of change.
	Dartington (1998)	Applies the concept of primary task to a voluntary non-profit organization to demonstrate the way different stakeholders claim psychological ownership of the organization.
	Valcour (2002)	Investigates the tensions inherent in a complex role system where volunteers are also suppliers and clients by empirically examining teachers' attempts to direct parents' voluntary efforts in a parent cooperative nursery school.
	Ronel (2006)	Considers the effects of volunteering behaviour on clients by examining the impact of personal encounters between at-risk street youths and volunteers in a mobile outreach service.
	Neubert et al. (2006)	Empirically analyses the perceptions of volunteers in a non-profit organization to theorize the relationship between members' perceptions of group potency, members' personality traits and fundraising behaviour.
	Haski-Leventhal and Bargal (2008)	Qualitative case study which traces the process of volunteer socialization into an outreach programme for at-risk street youth in Israel using ethnographic data.
	Mangan (2009)	Theorizes what it means to be a volunteer in the Credit Union in Ireland by drawing on the responses of volunteers.

APPENDIX B: DATA COLLECTION

INTERVIEWS

Pseudonym	Position	Length of interview
John	RNLI director	40 min
Andrew	RNLI director	60 min
Eithne	RNLI director	60 min
Paul	RNLI director	16 min
Roderick	RNLI director	40 min
Dennis	RNLI senior manager	120 min
Dave	RNLI senior manager	150 min
Jack	RNLI manager	60 min
Steven	RNLI manager	30 min
Joseph	RNLI manager	46 min
Sive	RNLI staff officer	75 min
Karen	RNLI trainer-assessor	180 min
Charlie	Lifeboat operations manager	16 min
Finn	Lifeboat operations manager	40 min
Ben	Station chairman	60 min
Christy	Coxswain	60 min
Daragh	Coxswain	30 min
Fiach	Coxswain	40 min
John Paul	Coxswain	36 min
Sean	Coxswain	90 min
Pierce	Second coxswain	60 min
Frank	Second coxswain	46 min
George	Second coxswain	40 min
Peter	Second coxswain	10 min
Mick	Training coordinator & second mechanic	65 min
Mark	Deputy launching authority	30 min
Conor	Mechanic	90 min
Pat	Mechanic	75 min
Ross	Mechanic	30 min
Ruth	Second Mechanic	35 min
Justin	Trainee mechanic & trainee coxswain	40 min
Phil	Crew member	60 min
Luke	Crew member	46 min
Ciaran	Crew member	15 min
James	Crew member	15 min
Cathal	Crew member	20 min
Rory	Crew member	25 min
Brendan	Crew member	20 min
Tom	Crew member	35 min
Richard	Crew member	10 min

INTERVIEWS
Total interview hours 33
hours

PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION
Simulation exercise at the lifeboat training college 2 hrs
30 min

NON-PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION
Management communication and command training session at HQ 30
hours

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