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**“I do it for the riders!” An Analysis of the Serious Leisure  
Framework Through Psychological Contract Theory**

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## Abstract

This thesis makes an empirical examination of the Serious Leisure framework using psychological contract theory, applying this to volunteers within Riding for the Disabled Association (RDA).

Serious Leisure is a widely utilised way of understanding the behaviour of hobbyists, leisure participants and volunteers, and yet its conceptual limitations to date have not been significantly considered or challenged in the literature. By analysing the interaction between Serious Leisure and the psychological contract, this study extends the existing framework of Serious Leisure as applied to volunteers.

An inductive, constructivist approach was used, and semi-structured interviews were conducted with twenty-five volunteers in a long-established UK voluntary sport organisation. These exhibited varying lengths of service in a number of roles within RDA. Data generated were analysed using an ethnographic content approach, together with information from the organisation itself and academic literature, to address the aims of the study.

The study establishes that the volunteers interviewed may be classified as serious leisure volunteers in Stebbins' terms. It supports the hypothesis that Serious Leisure does influence the psychological contract. It explores the formative influences on the psychological content and maps the content of that contract from the perspective of the volunteer. It introduces the concept of 'intentionality', a pattern whereby the new volunteer exhibits characteristics of seriousness from the beginning. It is proposed that the volunteer's acceptance of Serious Leisure characteristics sits alongside ideological factors in their psychological contract to create a high level of resilience and commitment to the activity. Finally, it proposes that volunteers are able to hold multiple psychological contracts with an organisation, simultaneously.

These findings address significant gaps in the literature of volunteering and also have implications for psychological contract theory. The study suggests a number of areas for further work to develop its findings.

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## 1 – Introduction to the Study

Why people do what they do has always been of interest to researchers. There are many studies of motivation, commitment, passion, values, ethics, interpersonal relationships and so on in the workplace, all of which add value to our understanding of ourselves and the people around us. Indeed, it may be argued that without an understanding of others, we cannot live a full and productive life.

In many societies, there is evidence that people have helped each other for no visible reward, but rather for shared pleasure or survival. This ‘voluntary’ activity has formed the backbone of civilised (and possibly uncivilised society) and increasingly is part of the recognised economy of nations. Whatever form it takes – civil service through natural disaster clear-ups such as after the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami, assistance in schools with literacy skills or visiting elderly and isolated neighbours – voluntary activity contributes to society by its outcomes. It often also contributes to the emotional and mental wellbeing of the volunteer (Corporation for National & Community Service, 2007).

According to figures published by Sport England (2016), nearly half of all British adults volunteered regularly during 2014, and 12% volunteered for sport, making sport an area of significant interest for volunteer studies. The estimated value of volunteering to the UK economy is in excess of £40bn per year (Volunteering England, 2012). Of those who volunteer in the UK, approximately half volunteer in the sport sector and without this input it is likely that the sport opportunities would look very different and be far less accessible than they are.

Sport engenders considerable enthusiasm and commitment in people; typically volunteers in the sport sector have high levels of skill and involvement over many years. The framework of Serious Leisure developed by Stebbins (2007) has explanatory power for such behaviour



and offers ways to understand the motivations of people engaged in sport volunteering. It has been applied successfully to sport situations (Miesener & Doherty, 2010; Yoder, 1997; Bartram, 2011), demonstrating that people engaged in supporting sport – through coaching, facilities maintenance and management, team support or whatever – often show high levels of persistence, determination and shared values. However, although it is popular as an explanation for behaviour in volunteers, there is little knowledge currently about the impact of serious leisure on other aspects of a person's engagement with their activity. It might be inferred that the existence of a serious leisure approach would affect the outcomes they expect from their volunteering, or the relationship they have with the voluntary organisation, for instance, but this has not been studied in any depth to date.

The management of volunteers has received scant attention from researchers in the field of Human Resource Management, in spite of the impact of volunteers on society, and indeed the importance of volunteering to many corporate organisations, which rely on voluntary activity by their employees to fulfil their social responsibilities. Recruitment and retention of volunteers is the exception to this, and these areas have been studied in some depth (Bussell & Forbes, 2003; Hoye et al., 2008; Boezeman & Ellemers, 2008b). Beyond recruitment and retention, however, little has been researched. In particular, the tension between what the volunteer expects to give and gain, and what they actually do contribute and receive has not been explored. Such expectations are more commonly referred to as the 'psychological contract' (Rousseau 1989) and this is a topic which links to recruitment and retention and the success of voluntary activity. The psychological contract in people engaged in serious leisure is even less studied; Nichols (2013) considered the psychological contract in volunteers but the paper was not specific to serious leisure.

This study therefore seeks to fill part of that gap by examining how serious leisure volunteers in Riding for the Disabled Association (incorporating Carriage Driving) (RDA) form and manage their psychological contract.

RDA is a large UK voluntary organisation which provides horse riding as therapy and sport for people of all ages with some form of mental or physical disability. Volunteers in RDA are typically long-serving and demonstrate considerable commitment to the organisation whilst often performing roles of considerable responsibility in terms of the organisation's activities.

The thesis aims to:

- Examine the serious leisure status of volunteers in Riding for the Disabled Association
- Identify the factors contributing to the formation of the psychological contract
- Map the content of the psychological contract in volunteers in RDA
- Use psychological contract theory to develop the framework of serious leisure in the case of volunteers in RDA
- Discuss the implications for the study of serious leisure volunteers.

The title of this thesis includes a quote from one of the interviews conducted for the study: "I do it for the riders". In simplistic terms, this quote could be used to explain why volunteers from RDA provide their time, skill and dedication for totally altruistic purposes. However in reality, as the thesis will show, the factors affecting the seriousness of RDA volunteers and the psychological contract they form with the organisation, sometimes in a multi-layered format, is a little more complex than just seeing the joy of a disabled person achieve something through horse riding.

## 1.1 The tradition of volunteering in equestrian sports

In common with many sports, equestrian sport – especially at a competitive level – is dependent on voluntary activity. Riding is an expensive sport, the upkeep of horses is labour intensive and the provision of modern competitive facilities requires extensive building infrastructure and access to land. Little is known about the extent to which volunteers facilitate ‘equestrian’ activity overall: the British Equestrian Federation suggests that ‘tens of thousands of volunteers each give an average of 15.5 hours each year to equestrian sport and recreation’ (BEF website, volunteers page). This figure is probably a conservative estimate of the size of the volunteer pool; as has been shown in Chapter 1, RDA alone accounts for more than 18,000 volunteers and the Pony Club claims 20,000 (Pony Club website, volunteers page). Other member bodies are coy regarding the number of volunteers they utilise; some – by no means all – have specific volunteer databases but it is likely that there is significant duplication of names across these databases as the majority of grassroots riders and supporters will claim multiple disciplines. For instance, I have been an active volunteer for RDA and three other disciplines and am far from alone in this. The BEF’s member bodies all rely on volunteers to keep their activities running – the majority of coaches, judges, trainers, course builders, administrators and club officials perform their roles without payment and for the love of the activity. Many – but far from all – have come into the activity through involvement with their children’s hobbies; the Pony Club, for instance, is overwhelmingly resourced by parents of members. At the competitive level of any of the disciplines, officials and organisers may no longer ride but are frequently ex-competitors. Additionally, the equestrian ‘world’ has an extensive unaffiliated structure, in which local clubs or entirely independent organisations exist and organise activities. It is, therefore, impossible to make more than an educated guess at the size of the volunteer labour base. In these senses, equestrian sport is fairly similar to the structure of other sports: voluntary activity becomes more professionalised and less ‘grassroots’ as the competitive

level increases. Unlike many other sports in which participation depends on club membership however, riding is an individual sport and membership of any association or body is voluntary and represents only a minority of participants.

This study is situated within Riding for the Disabled Association incorporating Carriage Driving (RDA). A national organisation, RDA provides opportunities for people with disabilities of all kinds to experience interaction with horses as therapy and sport. With nearly 500 Groups around the UK, they give 28,000 people the chance to ride, drive or vault regularly. To facilitate this activity, RDA has 19,000 volunteers, of whom 20% are under 25 years of age (RDA, 2015). A more comprehensive introduction to the organisation is given in Chapter Two.

## 1.2 Structure of thesis

Chapters Two and Three introduce the key concepts being considered in the study. Serious Leisure is discussed in **Chapter Two**, beginning by explaining the framework and its constituent parts. This chapter then explores how the framework has been conceptualised in the extant literature, discussing the arguments and uses that have been made of it to date. Its applications in various sectors of leisure activity are discussed and the section concludes with coverage and analysis of the few critiques which have been made of the framework. An introduction to Riding for the Disabled Association follows in this chapter as a natural extension to Serious Leisure. This section provides an overview of the organisation and presents the themes around which the analysis throughout the study will be made.

**Chapter Three** discusses the psychological contract, exploring the many schools of thought around the concept. The problems of multiple definitions are discussed, as are the ways various academics have tried to address this issue. The historical development of the concept is considered followed by an analysis of key features and branches of work which have been made. These cover the way in which the concept has been researched and the

challenges of applying it to volunteers when it was intended for use in an employment context. Topics such as time and the role of formative signals are also considered. The relevance of this theory to the study at hand is examined and the chapter culminates with a synthesis of the theory through development of the questions which the study intends to address.

The methods used to conduct the study are described and discussed in **Chapter Four**. As well as explaining methodological choices informing this work, the chapter gives an account of the natural history of the study, taking into consideration the precedents set by similar research and how some organisation-specific factors were allowed for. It also provides a discussion of the challenges encountered and the role of the researcher within the research. A summary of interviews conducted is included, and also the full set of nodes used for analysis of the data generated by interviews. Finally, the methodological limitations of the study are considered and discussed.

Chapters Five, Six and Seven present the data gathered through interviews with a specific focus in each and in increasingly analytical ways. Firstly, in **Chapter Five** the Serious Leisure status of the volunteers interviewed is considered and discussed. Applying Stebbins' (2007) six characteristics of Serious Leisure generates the conclusion that these are, indeed, serious leisure volunteers. The evidence for this claim is clearly shown and examined. The second part of the chapter considers how volunteers become committed to RDA, discussing the trajectory of both established and newer volunteers and introducing a diagrammatic representation of the route taken to 'serious' status.

**Chapter Six** discusses the themes that influence the psychological contract in RDA but sit outside an analysis of content. Building on the review in Chapter Three, it addresses who the psychological contract is with, within this organisation and the role of formative factors on the creation of the contract. The importance of organisational culture and the benefits

of volunteering are discussed as factors which also inform the psychological contract and the chapter concludes with an examination of the way volunteers deal with the challenges they face in their roles.

Developing these ideas, **Chapter Seven** uses the transactional, relational, ideological framework common in the extant literature to map the content of the psychological contract of volunteers in RDA. It identifies that the contract can be further separated into two sections – ‘what I give’ and ‘what I receive’ to aid understanding and also shows that, for these volunteers, there is significant movement from the content of the contract of an employee, as suggested in the literature. Furthermore, this chapter explores how volunteers deal with their psychological contract when they hold multiple roles at different levels within the organisation, and the implications this has for existing understanding of the concept.

Combining the Serious Leisure framework and psychological contract theory explicitly, **Chapter Eight** discusses the findings in preceding chapters to develop an evaluation of the intersections between the Serious Leisure framework and the psychological contract. It introduces the concept of ‘intentionality’; a process whereby newer volunteers come into the organisation with an explicit aim of becoming serious. Considering the understandings expressed in the extant literature, it further discusses the influence of organisational culture, ethos and values on the psychological contract, hypothesising that these factors create a strongly ideological psychological contract. The formation of multi-layered psychological contracts is also discussed and the chapter concludes with a reflection on the changes in society as demonstrated by volunteering practice in this organisation.

The thesis closes in **Chapter Nine** with some suggestions for further work to develop the findings in this thesis.

## 2 – Understanding Serious Leisure

This study of volunteers in RDA focuses on Stebbins' Serious Leisure framework. If leisure is activity undertaken that is not work and is freely chosen then it has the potential to be an important part of people's lives. This chapter will explain what Serious Leisure is, what forms it can take and why it is an important concept in volunteer studies. Serious Leisure is a popular explanatory framework for freetime activity and has been applied to many different areas. Not all leisure is 'serious' however, and the existence of 'casual' and 'project-based' leisure have equally been the subject of studies since the popularisation of the ideas by Stebbins in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Building a case for using the framework to understand the data generated in this study by thematically mining the work that has been published, the chapter draws conclusions on the value that Serious Leisure has for the study and then considers critiques which have been made of the framework. In so doing, it applies a critical eye to the framework and analyses its value to research.

I will then set out why volunteers in RDA are a suitable population for this study to be set in. This section will cover the demographic, hierarchy, structure and motivations of the volunteers and give an overview of the organisation, creating a clear picture of the environment for the study.

### 2.1 Defining Leisure Activity

Serious leisure is the topic of interest in this thesis and will be explored in depth within this chapter. For completeness, and to ensure an understanding of the whole area, however, all three approaches discussed by Stebbins are considered briefly below.

Stebbins suggests that leisure activities – of whatever sort – may be categorised as

“career and casual, formal and informal, and occupational and nonoccupational” (1996: abstract)

By categorising leisure activity as ‘career (or) casual’, Stebbins suggests that sometimes activities are undertaken for fun – short-term diversions or regular but non-demanding activities (watching movies, drinks with friends, for instance), whilst other activities demand much more attention – these tend to be long-term, structured and requiring knowledge of the topic at hand. The former, he classifies as casual leisure; the latter activities as ‘serious leisure’.

Serious leisure has been defined by Stebbins as

“The systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or a volunteer activity sufficiently substantial and interesting in nature for the participant to find a career there in the acquisition and expression of a combination of its special skills, knowledge, and experience.” (1996:215)

A further category set out by Stebbins is that of project-based leisure. In the project-based characterisation, people engage with an activity that is discrete and temporally bounded to produce a particular outcome. To be classified as ‘project based’, there is no requirement for that activity to be of a particular type, linked to any other activity carried out by that person or of any specific duration. As will be seen, however, the lines between project-based leisure and the other two categories become somewhat blurry at times, leading to some criticism of the validity of this aspect of the framework.

### 2.1.1 Serious Leisure

Serious leisure as a framework was first put forward by Robert Stebbins in 1982 and has become an accepted and popular way to explain the experiences of people who spend time and energy on their hobby or other leisure activity.

It is identified by six explicit characteristics, within which nine explicit rewards from the activity may be found. The characteristics of the activity are:



- a need to *persevere* with the activity
- the formation of a *career* in the leisure activity
- the requirement for *significant personal effort* using specially acquired knowledge, training, experience or skill
- the existence of *durable benefits* such as self-actualisation, feelings of accomplishment, social interaction and physical products of the activity
- the *creation of an ethos* of the activity – that is, shared attitudes, practices, beliefs, goals and so on
- participants tend to *identify* with their serious leisure pursuit. (Stebbins, 1996).

It is important to note that all characteristics of serious leisure are not necessarily experienced with the same strength at the same time by all participants. It is suggested by all writers in the field that, in order to be considered as serious leisure, all six characteristics should be present, but Wilks (2014) as well as Stebbins (2007) acknowledge that some characteristics may show themselves more strongly than others, depending upon the activity at hand, the individual's preconditions for involvement and their particular motivations for involvement in the activity.

Reflecting on the development of skills and ability in Taekwondo, leading to self-actualisation and self-expression, Kim et al (2011) suggest that 'serious leisure may play an important role in facilitating personal growth'.

### 2.1.2 Project-based Leisure

Typically describing involvement in a short-term or one-off activity, project based leisure may best be conceptualised as involvement in the running of an event or specific undertaking. Often intense in its demands, project-based leisure may demonstrate the characteristics of seriousness such as complexity and the need for specialised knowledge, without the long-term time commitment although these are not necessarily a pre-requisite. Stebbins (2005) suggests that project-based leisure occurs at one-off events, specifically including volunteering at festivals and sport events. Although this is a phenomenon which

has been recognised for many years (Macduff, 1991) first referred to episodic volunteers), for Stebbins it is a later addition to the lexicon of leisure, coming more than twenty years after his first conceptualisation of serious leisure and its casual counterpart (1982).

There is some debate (Macduff, 1991; Wilks, 2014) about the terms 'project-based' and 'episodic' when applied to volunteers – whether they describe the same phenomenon. It is the view of this author that they are different things; episodic volunteering tending to be seen more as an on-off type occupation following similar activity themes, whereas project-based volunteering is typically a one-off with a specific beginning and end point – such as a sports event or art exhibition – with the participant moving onto another project at some point after the current one has finished. It is noted though, that people who take part in events such as sporting mega-events may make a 'career' of following and volunteering at many such events. In this way, although each separate event may be considered project-based leisure – with a clear start and end point – in Stebbins' terms, there are many elements of 'serious leisure' embedded in their activity. Wilks (2014) follows such a group through their volunteer experiences at the 2012 Olympics and notes that all six characteristics of serious leisure are identifiable in the data and that many participants in her study express the desire and intention to volunteer at consequent mega sport events as a result of their experiences in London. This desire and intent even extended to one participant expressing the goal to learn to speak Portuguese to facilitate volunteering at the 2016 Olympics. Wilks suggests that 'careers may be episodic in nature, but linked by the use of similar skills'. There is, therefore, some overlap visible between the categories of leisure activity and clear boundaries are not straightforward to navigate. In many senses, it does not matter to the participant *what* kind of leisure they are involved in, this being more a management issue than a factor in the decision to participate in activities. It remains the case though that whilst all the characteristics of serious leisure may be identified in participants, the *intent* to be serious about an activity also has to be there for it to be considered serious. It is by no means

the case however that boundaries between leisure types are always blurred, and many instances of pure project-based leisure can be found.

### 2.1.3 Casual Leisure

Often regarded as the 'poor cousin' of serious leisure, and having gained much less attention than either serious or project-based leisure in research, casual leisure is nonetheless a recognised categorisation of activity in its own right. For Stebbins (1982), it is activity which is 'immediately, intrinsically rewarding and relatively short-lived; a pleasurable activity requiring little or no special training to enjoy it'. Initially used by Stebbins only as a 'foil' to the primary work on serious leisure, it was seen as activities undertaken by people during their leisure time if they were not engaged in serious leisure – that is, it was the subsidiary activity of non-work time. Stebbins admits that his early work 'painted [casual leisure participants] in depreciatory colours, which become ever more vivid when contrasted with the appreciatory portrayals of serious leisure' (2007:38). It is unsurprising, therefore, that casual leisure has received scant interest from researchers.

Activities such as socialising, watching films, playing sport informally – although it might also apply to Sunday leagues and the like as well as ad hoc gatherings – and watching television are suggested to be forms of casual leisure. All share the trait of engendering relaxation and regeneration without the associated focus and commitment of serious leisure.

Although only regarded as a transitory activity needing no commitment, casual leisure boasts a number of benefits, including enjoyment, pleasure and fun. Stebbins (2007:41) suggests that social attraction or interpersonal relationships may also be a benefit of casual leisure in certain circumstances. Such activities are important, it is suggested, because they provide balance to the alternative conceptions of our time-use – that of work or serious leisure. In casual leisure, there is the opportunity to engage in an activity without a long-term plan or the existence of consequences. In this way, it provides an antidote to too much

concentration and commitment. Shen and Yarnal (2010) suggest that “an important understanding emergent from our analysis is that the process of casual leisure can be engaging and enriching, and the outcome psychological benefits can be lasting and meaningful.” In this way, although not seriously regarded by many academic researchers, casual leisure plays an important role in the development of society.

## 2.2 Serious leisure: some issues for consideration

### 2.2.1 Identity

The development of an interest to such an extent that it becomes a significant part of a person’s life and begins to display the characteristics of serious leisure is, for many, a rewarding and important phase. In including the condition that ‘participants begin to identify with the leisure activity’, Stebbins uncovered an aspect of individuals’ behaviours that fundamentally changes who they are and how they see themselves. People with a serious leisure interest are passionate about that activity, and as part of their lifestyle, they tend to not only identify with the activity, but form their own identity around the activity. Thus, they cease to be ‘a person who does x activity’ and become instead ‘an x-er’. Taylor and Kay (2015) use serious leisure as a vehicle in their exploration of identity construction, showing how each participant (*‘the dog trainer’*; *‘the mountain biker’*; *‘the canoeist’*) construct their sense of self through their activity. ‘The Fisherman’ described how he got involved in fishing as a child, leading into his adult passion, in a way which assumed that the interviewer understood and shared the experience. As they express it, ‘when an individual has a long term relationship with an occupation, that relationship and the meaning for her occupation may change over time, shaping identity’. This is seen in other studies too; Baldwin and Norris (1999) and Hartel (2010) both demonstrate the sense of belonging and ownership in the area of interest by their respective respondents. This is more than just ‘identifying with the activity’; it represents people engaged in serious leisure internalising

their leisure to the point that it changes their self-identity and influences their self-image, perception and life choices. Taylor and Kay explain that identity is 'multi-faceted': a number of angles of experience and value may be combined in the one experience. Thus, serious leisure becomes a shaping factor in the trajectory their life may take

### 2.2.2 Professionals-Amateurs-Publics

Within the body of literature on Serious Leisure, the challenges of the complex relationships between professionals in the field, the amateurs who practice serious leisure and are therefore intimately involved in the field occupied by the professionals and the publics who receive the work of the professionals and serious amateurs has been explored by several authors. Stebbins first referred to the P-A-P dynamic in 1992, when he discussed amateurs responding to 'standards of excellence set and communicated' by professionals. The P-A-P context is especially relevant in fields where people with Serious Leisure interests – who do not earn money from their activity – have professional counterparts (that is, people who earn money – whether full or part time from this activity) and where there are other interested people who have less of a serious interest than the Amateurs. Amateurs who are serious about their leisure activities by definition encroach on the professional's world; their skill acquisition, focus and enthusiasm often leads to excellence (or at least, a high level of competence) in their chosen area and the time, money and energy they spend sets them apart from enthusiasts and 'hobbyists' who engage in casual leisure. Such people will naturally be viewed by the latter as outsiders or 'socially marginal' in Stebbins' language – although they are very much part of their own social world. The serious amateur therefore naturally gravitates toward professional standards, leading to opportunities for performance of some sort. Cox and Blake's (2011) discussion of food blogging as serious leisure explores the amateur's attitudes towards professionals and public, suggesting varying degrees of amateurism are found, from 'hobbyists' who sit outside this P-A-P dynamic to 'pre-professionals' who seek to develop their serious leisure activity into a professional income-

earning activity. For Cox and Blake's respondents, publics were different for each person but all were aware of the need to satisfy those who read their blogs.

### 2.2.3 Serious-Casual dichotomy or continuum?

In his early work, Stebbins places Serious Leisure as a position in its own right, with clear characteristics which set it apart from the other forms of leisure activity discussed above. Shen and Yarnal (2010), however, point out that serious leisure does not explain every aspect of leisure activity; indeed it is possible to identify some serious characteristics amongst people following leisure activities which are clearly short-term and 'casual', such as college students' drinking activities. In their study of the Red Hat Society, they suggest that elements of satisfaction for participants come from factors normally ascribed to Serious Leisure such as self-esteem and a sense of accomplishment, even though the activity itself is clearly casual, if ongoing and regular. They propose that 'serious leisure and casual leisure may be relatively unambiguously distinguished in terms of levels of behavioural commitment, but the psychological benefits derived from each are not necessarily commensurate with the behavioural involvement.' Moreover, the 'psychological outcomes' of such activity depends on participants' own understanding of their leisure experience, the 'dynamic within the social world' in which the activity takes place and the 'content and structure of activities'. In this way, they posit that the characteristics of serious and casual leisure are similar and should be seen as a continuation of one another rather than separate things altogether.

It is intuitively obvious that all participants in an activity cannot be *either serious or casual*, when those two terms are seen statically. If this is seen as a pure dichotomy then 'serious' is effectively implying that all attention is focussed on that activity, with little or no space for other activities and 'casual' becomes a pejorative term meaning that person pays scant attention to such leisure activity without any intent toward knowledge acquisition or mastery. When applied to any leisure pursuit one can think of, this is clearly not a tenable

situation. Shen and Yarnal (2010) were the first to suggest that 'serious' and 'casual' are opposite poles of a continuum encompassing all statuses of leisure activity. Such a continuum allows people to move along that continuum as time and circumstance dictate, or will and interest allow. Some work, however, has gone further than this in suggesting that even the continuum places artificial demarcation between levels of activity, and that no such categorisation is possible (Gallant, Arai & Smale, 2013). The latter argue that serious leisure, when considered critically, is more a 'complex and textured' experience than an activity. In his attempt to reconcile the schools of serious leisure and recreation specialisation (Bryan, 1977), Scott (2012) suggests that this view [of a continuum of activity and interest] 'has been a fundamental tenet ... since its' [recreation specialisation] inception'. Indeed, in his response to Scott (2012), Stebbins (2012) suggests that the latter two papers add clarity to an area of serious leisure research which remains under-researched.

#### 2.2.4 Rewards of Serious Leisure

The rewards of Serious Leisure (termed by Stebbins as 'durable benefits') include personal enrichment, self-actualisation, self-expression, self-image, self-gratification, recreation and financial reward. Two further rewards, those of social attraction and group accomplishment are also identified (Stebbins, 1996). These rewards, Stebbins argues, are central to the experience of serious leisure and are experienced in ways that are unique to each type of leisure activity undertaken. Thus, a hobbyist engaged in serious leisure will find their reward in one way, whilst a serious leisure volunteer would recognise their rewards differently, albeit normally fitting in the same categories. In keeping with an individualistic approach to the concept, it is suggested by Qian and Yarnal (2010) that 'different respondents derived different benefits from the same volunteering activity', as also seen in Cuskelly and Harrison (1997). Qian and Yarnal explored the benefits gained by volunteers leading university tours and found that the benefits identified by Stebbins (1998) are in need of refinement to further

strengthen and develop the serious leisure framework; they also strongly emphasised that different volunteers will experience different combinations of such benefits. The rewards of serious leisure have not been well explored in the literature, possibly because (according to Stebbins) they could be so varied. Whatever form they take, the reward of the activity must outweigh its cost to bring the person back again to the activity.

Serious leisure has been demonstrated to exist in many different fields of activity. An overarching recognition in the literature however, is that the six characteristics are always present and easily recognisable, even though not all characteristics will be present to the same degree. Gould et al.'s (2008) Serious Leisure Inventory Measure offers a measurement tool to assess a participant's seriousness to their activity, through a 54-item survey which addresses the six characteristics. This quantitative approach has been taken up by some researchers, but the majority continue to take an ethnographic approach to the establishment of the characteristics, reflecting the very personal and differentiated nature of individual experiences of leisure.

#### 2.2.5 Leisure as Work

Whilst much of the focus on serious leisure has considered non-work activity, that is activity which occurs during the time not engaged in paid work, Filho (2010) explored what happens when leisure activity is turned into a way to earn a living: thus combining leisure and work. This fits in many ways with the concept of serious leisure, and it is a small step from Stebbins' concept to a position allegedly suggested by Confucius: "find a job you love and you'll never have to work a day in your life." The characteristics of serious leisure give themselves to the conversion of some leisure interests to employment, in the way Filho's participants used their passion for the leisure activity of whitewater rafting to enable others to experience the thrill – thus turning their hobby into a job. Whilst this is clearly not the intention of Stebbins' concept, it is a valid extension of the approach and one which can be seen in other areas of



sport and craft activity especially, as people develop their interests into businesses. This is not well documented, but is an area for further research, offering a counterpoint to the more explored area of developing an interest into serious leisure as a volunteering activity.

### 2.3 Constraint Negotiation

The existence of an interest so significant that it forms such a substantial, interesting and fulfilling activity to create a career of some sort for the participant implies that a great deal of time and effort goes into that activity. It is identified in the characteristics of Serious Leisure that participants will encounter obstacles to their participation and will have to demonstrate commitment and perseverance to continue with the activity. Stebbins does not identify where such obstacles or causes for perseverance might come from; however, there is a body of literature which has considered the sources of such obstacles and begun to document the most common causes of obstacles to commitment, or *constraints* as they have become known.

Work on leisure constraints began with Crawford and Godbey's (1987) work on intrapersonal, interpersonal and structural barriers to participation. Their 'seminal' conceptualisation (Kennelly, Moye & Lamont, 2013) has been challenged by work more recently, notably by Samdahl (2007) and Henderson and Bialeschki (1993), who suggested that such constraints should be seen in a dynamic and interrelated fashion to explain their effect. Kennelly, Moye and Lamont (2013) explored the effect of constraints on Serious triathletes participation in training and competitions and concluded that an important source of constraint on participation was the views of 'significant others' when making decisions about their participation. These 'significant others' may be spouse, family, friends, work colleagues or bosses – all of whom (and perhaps others not identified) have a claim on the participants' time and energy. Noteworthy in their findings was that participants, recognising the demands on their time, may reduce their commitment to their training and

competing for periods in acknowledgement of the needs of family or work, for instance. They would then restart the activity after a suitable gap once the constraining conditions had been rebalanced.

This 'cyclical' approach to Serious Leisure has not been examined or exposed in other studies and may be another explanation of the patterns seen in participants in Serious Leisure. The implications of this finding are important in understanding that a serious commitment is not necessarily temporally consistent, and may therefore be reasonably fitted around other lifestyle factors.

## 2.4 Applications by Sector

This section will consider where serious leisure might be found. Although the sections that follow are delineated by activity type, there is rarely an absolute divide between the types and frequently activities may be placed in two – or possibly all three – sections. Just as the lines between project-based and serious leisure are blurred for some activities, so it is with the type of activity being considered below. For clarity, the main purpose of the study being considered is used to determine where it should sit.

### 2.4.1 Voluntary Sector

Volunteering may be defined as 'giving unpaid help through a group, club or organisation' (formal volunteering) or 'giving unpaid help to individual people who are not relatives' (informal volunteering) (NCVO, 2016a). The nature of voluntary activity as an 'uncoerced activity which is willingly entered into' suggests that it is likely in many cases to be a by-product of leisure activity. Volunteering is an extremely common activity covering nearly all aspects of human life and studies of volunteers also inform many aspects of the social science literature. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) suggests that the value of voluntary activity in the UK was approximately 1.5% of GDP (£23.9 billion) in 2012, making it economically as well as socially important. This figure equates to 41% of the population

volunteering formally at least once a year, 27% at least once a month with an average of 11.9 hours per year volunteered. Informal volunteering figures are higher; 62% of the population at least once per year, 36% at least once per month (NCVO, 2016a).

On the basis that volunteers are conducting their voluntary activity in 'out-of-work' time and willingly (not coerced), Stebbins (1996) argues that voluntary activity equals leisure activity, even if it is of varying intensity and commitment. Whilst much volunteering represents what Stebbins would term 'casual' or 'project-based' leisure, a significant proportion may be classed as serious leisure. The extreme commitment of some volunteers to their leisure activity is commonly noted: many studies have shown that committed volunteers both in and outside the sport world demonstrate the existence of serious – or career – characteristics in their leisure activities (Stebbins, 2007; Orr, 2006; Miesener, Doherty & Hamm-Kerwin, 2010).

An early conception of the volunteer is that they are indulging in a 'hobby' or leisure activity by doing their volunteering. Stebbins (1996) suggests that 'volunteering is a worklike activity in which a person accomplishes a task without remuneration. At the same time, the activity, which is freely chosen, provides many satisfying experiences.'

The career angle of serious leisure has been least researched and tested: 'concepts and propositions composing the career volunteering part of the serious leisure perspective have the least empirical support' as Stebbins wrote (*new directions 123*), although he asserts (1996) that 'serious leisure volunteering is *career* volunteering' and likely to be driven by the motive of self-interest over altruism, even though the latter probably caused the volunteering in the first place. Stebbins further suggests that 'career volunteers can be distinguished from other types of serious leisure participants by the exceptional number of enriching experiences they gain by way of altruistic action' (1996).

According to Cuskelly et al. (2002), *“in the broadest sense, career volunteering is leisure volunteering; it is quasi-freely chosen helping activity distinguished by Parker (1997) from altruistic volunteering (entailing an unselfish concern for others), market volunteering (to meet one's need for work experience), and cause-serving volunteering (for moral, political, environmental, or religious ends).”*

Orr (2006) discusses perceived obligation to participate in a volunteer activity: “For Stebbins ‘a key element in the leisure conception of volunteering is the felt absence of moral coercion to do the volunteer activity’. (Stebbins, 2000). The ideas of choice and obligation are important to the discussion of leisure volunteering and people are uncoerced when they do something they want to do and something they are not disagreeably obliged to do. According to Stebbins, disagreeable obligation should be differentiated from agreeable obligation which is part of leisure ‘because such obligation accompanies positive attachment to an activity and because it is associated with pleasant memories and expectations’. In other words, a person can feel obligated to undertake a volunteer activity from which he or she can derive pleasure. In his examination of the leisure component of various volunteering activities Stebbins devised the term marginal volunteering to mark the greater or lesser sense of moral coercion felt.”

In many situations where volunteers develop a career in the activity, there is an element of coercion in the beginning. According to the National Council for Voluntary Organisations, 9% of respondents in the UK Civil Society Almanac gave ‘felt there was no-one else to do it’ as their primary motivation for volunteering (NCVO, 2016b). When so many sport clubs are run by unpaid committees, it is often the participants themselves, or their parents, who have to do the work of keeping the club running. In this sense, although not ‘coerced’, there will be pressure experienced to help out, which – through the creation of the shared social world – often develops an inability to step outside the helping role. Thus, what started as a duty

becomes a source of pride, pleasure and friendship, and therefore becomes seen as 'agreeable obligation'.

In line with Stebbins' own terms, above, the term 'career volunteer' was considered as a descriptor for volunteers in this study; however, it was discarded due to the volunteers' dislike of the term 'career' (as discussed in section 5.5 of the thesis). Therefore, volunteers participating in this study who fit the characteristics of the Serious Leisure framework will be referred to henceforth as 'serious leisure volunteers'.

#### 2.4.2 Community Work

Contributing to the development of the community is part of the free time activity of many, and indeed the involvement of local people is often a driver of many local activities and services. The role of serious leisure in making a 'substantial contribution ... to the functioning of the wider community' was discussed by Stebbins (1996). Because community activity can normally also be classified as 'voluntary', however, other studies are not multitudinous in their own right. However, there is some evidence of community work as leisure. Whether people staff the library to keep it open in the face of funding cuts or provide transport runs to hospital for the elderly and vulnerable, the provision of support in the local environment is commonly found in practice.

Roles such as being a Justice of the Peace – not instantly associated with 'leisure' – are discussed by Heley and Jones (2013) in their study of community building by older residents in rural Wales. They suggest that serious leisure is evident when retired people contribute regularly to activities within their community, but that involvement does not have to be time-intensive to demonstrate the characteristics, or garner the benefits, of serious leisure, rather it is the sustained nature of the activity and the effort or knowledge put into the activity which proves the status. This finding is in contrast to much work on serious leisure,

which suggests that activity is necessarily temporally and emotionally onerous before it can be considered to be 'serious'.

### 2.4.3 Sport

The extreme commitment of some volunteers to their leisure activity is not unusual or unprecedented: many studies have shown that committed volunteers both in and outside the sport world demonstrate the existence of serious – or career – characteristics in their leisure activities.

Coleman (2002) suggests that once a volunteer goes beyond a certain degree of involvement, their identity becomes bound up with the organisation's identity (Cuskelly et al., 2002) - therefore they are far less likely to leave the role or to question the level of work required and may become willing to shoulder significant responsibility for the organisation. Although Coleman did not specifically address serious leisure, his participants may be suggested to demonstrate such serious leisure characteristics as perseverance, significant effort as well as identification with the activity. Many sport organisations rely on this phenomenon to continue operating, with voluntary boards, coaches, trainers, groundsmen, supporters, amongst others, all playing a major part in the success of clubs. The development of a shared identity is a key characteristic of serious leisure, and is a commonly noted phenomenon amongst sport volunteers. As Baldwin and Norris (1999) note, volunteers often believe that the endeavour represents 'who they are'.

Serious Leisure has been noted in many fields of sporting activity, amongst which are long distance running (Yair, 1990), windsurfing (Wheaton, 2000), amateur ice skating (McQuarrie & Jackson, 1996), Taekwondo (Lee, Kim & Song, 2005; Kim, Dattilo & Heo, 2011), triathlon (Kennelly, Moye & Lamont, 2013), parents in youth sport (Siegenthaler & Leticia Gonzalez, 1997), mega-event volunteering (Wilks, 2014; Harrington, Cuskelly & Auld, 2000; Baum & Lockstone, 2007; Gravelle & Larocque, 2005) and dog agility (Gillespie, Leffler & Lerner,

2002; Baldwin & Norris, 1999; Hultsman, 2012). Indeed, sport is an area which naturally lends itself to the creation of a 'career' for participants, with the development of skill and knowledge implicit in the activity. Sport can easily be seen as fulfilling all six characteristics of Serious Leisure in many players, although clearly not all sporting involvement takes a serious form. Neither is all sport-related serious leisure carried out by players, as many people develop leisure careers in the 'support roles' of a club, or in running large or mega-events for sport.

For people who do develop a serious leisure career in participant sport, however, the costs as well as the benefits are clearly exhibited: in her study focusing on relationships and Serious Leisure, Hultsman's (2012) exploration of the role of established couples who participate in dog agility demonstrates both the rewards (increased support for the competing spouse, enriched relationship and quality time, common interests) and the costs (tension between spouses over performance, cost, time demands, other commitments such as family life) very well. In an insight which is not widely discussed in the literature, but must be common to many serious leisure participants in any field, Hultsman says, "when passionate about a hobby, your personal commitments are often split. When you add to the mix a personal relationship then the matrix becomes more complex." The role of this personal relationship in encouraging or stifling participation in serious leisure is not widely researched and sits alongside constraint negotiation (Kennelly, Moye & Lamont 2013) in explaining how some people persevere to experience their leisure activities.

Older volunteers are frequently found in sport organisations (Shibli et al., 1999; Coleman, 2002): whether former players, parents of players, spectators or officials, their contribution is significant. Doherty, Misener and Hamm-Kerwin, (2010) suggest a positive link between older sport volunteers and serious leisure, demonstrating the perceived importance of a sustained activity for this group. Findings show that the participants in this study exhibited

considerable resilience and commitment to their volunteering and were unlikely to identify negative factors which might cause them to consider leaving the organisation.

## 2.5 Critiques of Serious Leisure theory

Analysis of the assumptions underlying the concept of serious leisure is limited to a few studies. Whilst the ideas are widely used to discuss the use of time by people in a non-work context, and applied to widely differing activities (as above), for the most part Stebbins' concept is left value-free and unchallenged. This section considers some of the critiques made of the concept to date.

### 2.5.1 The cost of Serious Leisure

Critiques of Serious Leisure suggest that it has been presented as a value-less concept which does not reflect the power and political realities of the life of participants. Whilst Stebbins suggests that the costs of serious leisure are 'not nearly as commonly examined as its rewards, leaving a gap in our understanding that must be filled' (2007:15). In the same work, however, he says that the benefits of seriousness must outweigh the costs in order for people to continue with their serious leisure activity.

The costs of Serious Leisure are not insubstantial: beyond the challenges of knowledge acquisition and tensions in the activity itself, for many participants the decision to devote time and financial resources into the development of such an interest have an impact more broadly than the participant themselves. In the nature of the focus required for Serious Leisure to take place, opportunity cost (defined as "the loss of benefits that may have eventuated if one course of action was prioritised over another" (Lamont & Kennelly, 2011), such as the potentially not meeting new friends by going out for an evening, instead choosing to stay home and watch television, for example) does occur. This is a difficult area to quantify and there is little empirical research to support it, however some papers have considered the costs of involvement in Serious Leisure (Baldwin & Norris, 1999; Stebbins,



2005, Gallant, Arai & Smale, 2013) and conclude that beyond the tangible costs, there may be broader costs such as the tension created within family and friends as participants focus on their leisure activity at the expense of quality time with significant others. For someone to participate in their leisure activity, other activities may have to be foregone, or decisions made to reduce the focus on others, for example when participants with children chose to climb rather than watch the children play in sports fixtures (Dilley & Scraton, 2010) or 'neglect of families' such as discussed by Lawrence (2006) for instance.

### 2.5.2 Recreation Specialisation

A small body of work has been developed in parallel to Serious Leisure since the 1970s, that of recreation specialisation. Initially discussed by Bryan (1977), this suggested that people might follow leisure pursuits (especially outdoor pursuits) across a continuum of 'classes' from 'casual' to 'committed' depending on their commitment, motivation and skill levels. This work was taken up- by a small group of researchers Scott (2012) reports Bryan and Stebbins agreeing that, had they known each other at the time, these two concepts may have become intertwined earlier than they have, or indeed may have been seen as complementary. Indeed, he suggests that the terms used in recreation specialisation are directly interchangeable with terms used in serious leisure when referring to McFarlane's (1994, 1996) work on birdwatchers. Further, Scott criticises much Serious Leisure work for being overly reliant on ethnography as a methodological approach, thus rendering it ineffective at 'measuring seriousness'. He does not explore why this is a weakness however, rather using it only as a point of difference between the two approaches. Recreation specialisation provides a critique of Serious Leisure in considering levels of involvement in a way that Stebbins' work has not explicitly done, although Stebbins (2012) suggests that the continuum was implied in his work even if it was not clearly discussed. Other literature on Serious Leisure has often been so focussed on 'proving' its existence in a specific field that discussion has not broadened to consider different levels of seriousness.

### 2.5.3 Influence on other people

Much of the discussion about serious leisure focuses solely on application to the individual participant. Very few studies consider the possibility that serious leisure activity – of any sort – might have an impact on people other than the participant. Naturally, where the focus of the activity is community-based work, the recipients must benefit, but in the majority of work this is assumed rather than proven and there is little demonstrated impact on the nature of serious activity on those recipients. Equally, very few researchers have suggested that the concept of serious leisure itself might be developed by consideration of the impact it has on recipients of activity undertaken by serious leisurists. Of those that do consider this, Kennelly, Moye and Lamont (2013) suggest ways to deal with conflict caused by the focus on the activity through constraint negotiation, whilst Qian and Yarnal (2010) deliberate upon the benefits provided for other people by the serious leisure activity itself. In the latter case, the recipients of the activity – those on the tours led by their volunteers – benefitted from their guides enjoying the friendships, personal development (confidence, public speaking) and sense of fun gained, all of which enhanced the output of the activity. The authors suggest that a more specific analysis of the benefits of serious leisure is due in order to develop an understanding of the ‘mutual influence’ of the various benefits. They suggest this as a possibility for further research.

### 2.5.4 Feminist

The role of leisure in women’s lives has attracted the attention of researchers for many years, in particular considering the normal assumptions that women carry a disproportionate share of duties in the domestic context as well as their role as primary carer for children and the elderly in families. The implication of these assumptions in the context of leisure research is that it is more difficult for women to gain access to leisure activities in general, and Serious Leisure activities in particular – with their greater time, skill and social world demands – than their male equivalents. This is borne out by participation figures for

sport in particular, which show clearly that women's participation is consistently below that of men's participation between the ages of 16 – 60 (Active People Survey 9, 2015). The many reasons identified for this difference include caring and domestic responsibilities leading to a lack of time and money, body confidence issues and a lack of facilities.

Within the body of literature on Serious Leisure, there are echoes of these concerns across all fields of research which have led to critiques that Serious Leisure is a gendered concept. Studying the Serious Leisure activities of women, Dilley and Scraton (2010) argue that 'the activity itself has been the main focus ... the social realm and relationships within it are acknowledged but are often treated as secondary.' Their findings suggests that the women in their study used their leisure activity – climbing – to construct part of their personal identity, justify their choices concerning lifestyle and relationships and to inform their decisions about the role of paid work in their lives. These decisions are presented as being relevant to a critique of Serious Leisure theory which takes more account of the structural factors in women's lives than work hitherto has done. Raisborough's attempt to overlay a feminist critique of what she argues is a male-dominated, apolitical view of leisure activity raises similar issues when she says, '*the view that serious leisure (as with other leisure forms) may be sites where societal power relations are at once resisted and reproduced, has escaped analysis.*' (1999). In common with other feminist critiques (cf. Gallant, Arai & Smale, 2013), she suggests that women engaged in Serious Leisure do so by making deliberate choices to leave other tasks (such as housework) undone to create the necessary time for leisure. The additional assertion that women engaged in Serious Leisure are often subjugated by the men in their lives, as when a female rock climber 'seconds' a male climber (Dilley & Scraton, 2010) or reduces her commitment to her drama group to allow her (male) partner to continue his involvement (Raisborough, 1999), is one which casts doubt over the accessibility of Serious Leisure as a positive activity for all.

Developing the feminist critique further by including communitarianism in their argument, Gallant, Smale and Arai (2013) focus on the value a community may gain from people's involvement in Serious Leisure. They suggest that the nurturance of strong identification and unique ethos (Stebbins, 2007), as found in the shared values and practices of a social world formed by such activity, 'can provide a sense of belonging and connectedness in an increasingly disconnected world.' They further suggest that Serious Leisure provides an outlet for the "politics of difference" advocated by feminist communitarianism in which the 'diversity that Serious Leisure inspires' can be celebrated.

#### 2.5.5 Negative experiences

The characteristics of serious leisure are presented in much of the literature with a 'rosy glow' around them; that is, with little or no acknowledgement that some aspects of the activity may be less than positive experiences, if not actually negative ones. This may be partially due to the deliberate choices made by those participating passionately in their interests, who categorise any negative experience as evidence of 'perseverance' or 'significant personal effort'. Nevertheless, it remains evident that for some participants there are elements of their activity which are unpleasant, undesirable or just not nice. That these are not fully acknowledged in the literature is a point made by Wilks (2014) and Rojek (2000). It would significantly benefit the understanding of the framework if more attention were to be paid to why such negative experience is minimised – often by participants themselves, but also in the way studies are written up in this field.

#### 2.5.6 Power and conflict

Orr (2006) suggests that 'issues of power and conflict' have not been addressed by the Serious Leisure literature but neither does she address them, merely noting that they exist in the relationships between professionals with their elite status as experts and volunteers in the museum volunteering sector considered in that article.

## 2.6 Conclusions - Critiques of Stebbins' theory of Serious Leisure

As noted above, many studies of serious leisure focus on particular activities at one point in time. Whilst this is valuable for proving or disproving the existence of serious leisure in that particular environment, it does not create space for consideration of the wider issues around the concept: does seriousness 'develop', does it change, can it be created by other participants or organisations and are there conditions which are necessary for seriousness to exist? These are wider, more 'macro-environment' questions which the narrow focus of much literature in the field does nothing to answer. Without answers to questions such as these, it becomes more difficult to use serious leisure as a helpful construct for understanding participants. Stebbins noted that 'little [published researched on serious leisure] has been truly confirmatory, however ... [but] such testing will come in time' (2007:36)

There is, therefore, little criticism of the concept of serious leisure as a whole, but many areas for development of the ideas. This study seeks to add further to the field by considering the impact of the psychological contract on the experience of volunteers engaged in serious leisure. In doing so, it addresses some of the critiques outlined here and adds to the depth of the concept.

## 2.7 Conclusion on Serious Leisure

Beyond the original conception of Serious Leisure as an activity so engrossing and rewarding that it becomes as a career for those involved, Stebbins (1997b) suggests that it may even create a lifestyle all of its own, where lifestyle is defined as 'a distinctive set of shared patterns of tangible behaviour that is organised around a set of coherent interests of social conditions or both, that is explained and justified by a set of related values, attitudes and orientations and that, under certain conditions, becomes the basis for a separate, common social identity for its participants.'

Research in this area has demonstrated the existence of such patterns of behaviour in many fields of leisure activity and some work has suggested areas of the framework which are ready for refinement or development.

## 2.8 Why use RDA for this study?

### 2.8.1 Introduction to Riding for the Disabled Association

Founded in 1969 in its current form, Riding for the Disabled Association (incorporating Carriage Driving) (henceforth 'RDA') now has approximately 500 Groups across the UK and uses more than 19,000 volunteers to provide nearly 430,000 'experiences' per year for people with a physical disability and/or learning difficulty. RDA is therefore, a 'therapy' organisation, existing on the periphery of medical support groups and recognised as a valuable part of many physiotherapy and physical therapy programmes. Furthermore, RDA has an established place in the equine industry as a facilitator of disabled riding as sport, with strong links to the British Equestrian Federation and through them to Paralympic sport – 6 of 7 TeamGB's 2008 Paralympic riders and all of the 2012 Paralympic team started in RDA, with some still very active in their Groups. This makes RDA a particularly interesting organisation for the study of volunteers as it is both a 'therapeutic' and a 'sport' voluntary organisation.

RDA is a federated organisation; each Group has independent legal status as a charity and its own organisational structure. Structured by the Constitution of RDA National, Groups have similar hierarchical structures, with a committee consisting of Chair and Treasurer, and other functionaries as necessary – often comprising of marketing, volunteer co-ordination and training. Bigger groups will have bigger committees. Each Group has an Instructor – larger Groups with several Instructors of different grades, some have their 'own' physiotherapist too. Groups are organised into Counties – not necessarily matching geographical counties (although normally similar) – of approximately 6-8 Groups each and

Counties are part of their respective Regions. Counties and Regions also have Instructors allied with them, who have responsibility for ensuring standards and training are maintained – thus ensuring quality and standardisation of qualifications. Regions and Counties are part of the national charity, so (in theory at least), they are controlled by National Office.

Overseeing the whole is National Office, based in Warwick, which provides approximately 13 full-time equivalent salaried employees to support the strategic and operational development of the organisation through the Board of Trustees and associated working groups and committees. Total income for RDA National in 2014/15 was in excess of £1.84m, of which 43% came from donations and grants and a further 32% from legacies (RDA Impact Report, 2015). Expenditure of £1.40m was spent on providing support to RDA Groups (75%), education, coaching training and national events (RDA Impact Report 2015). These figures do not relate to Groups, who manage their own finances.

National Office is also the organiser of the annual National Championships, the competitive outlet for Group activity through the year. Participants compete at regional competitions to qualify for the Nationals, a three-day event taking place each summer which acts as a celebration of RDAs activity through the year, a chance for volunteers to catch up, renew friendships and learn from each other and a place to celebrate the achievements of participants and Groups.

For many years, RDA functioned as an informal collection of interested and committed people; it is only recently that there has been increasing professionalisation of the organisation. This process began with the federation in 1999, to address (amongst other issues) increasing problems being faced around the transfer of funds within and between Groups and National Office. It continued, much more quickly after 2004, when the current Chief Executive was appointed.

With an increasing drive to professionalisation has come exposure to best practice in the voluntary sector generally and a move towards 'volunteer management' in a way not previously experienced. The current Chief Executive is a member of ACEVO and RDA achieved Investors in Volunteers accreditation in 2011.

This change in emphasis towards the care of the volunteer has challenged many aspects of RDA's values and, in some cases, highlighted areas of weakness in the way volunteers have been supported throughout the history of the organisation. However, the informality and 'family' nature has led to massive commitment by many volunteers, clearly aligned with Stebbins' serious leisure perspective. There has been some discussion within the organisation around whether the perceived 'seriousness' of volunteering in RDA may have reduced the availability and acceptability of new volunteers. This was the subject of work previously carried out within RDA (Brooke-Holmes, 2005).

Table 2.1 demonstrates the size and scope of activity within RDA across the UK. Clearly, this is a significant and stable organisation which provides the opportunity for it to support Groups to deliver the services for which it is known.

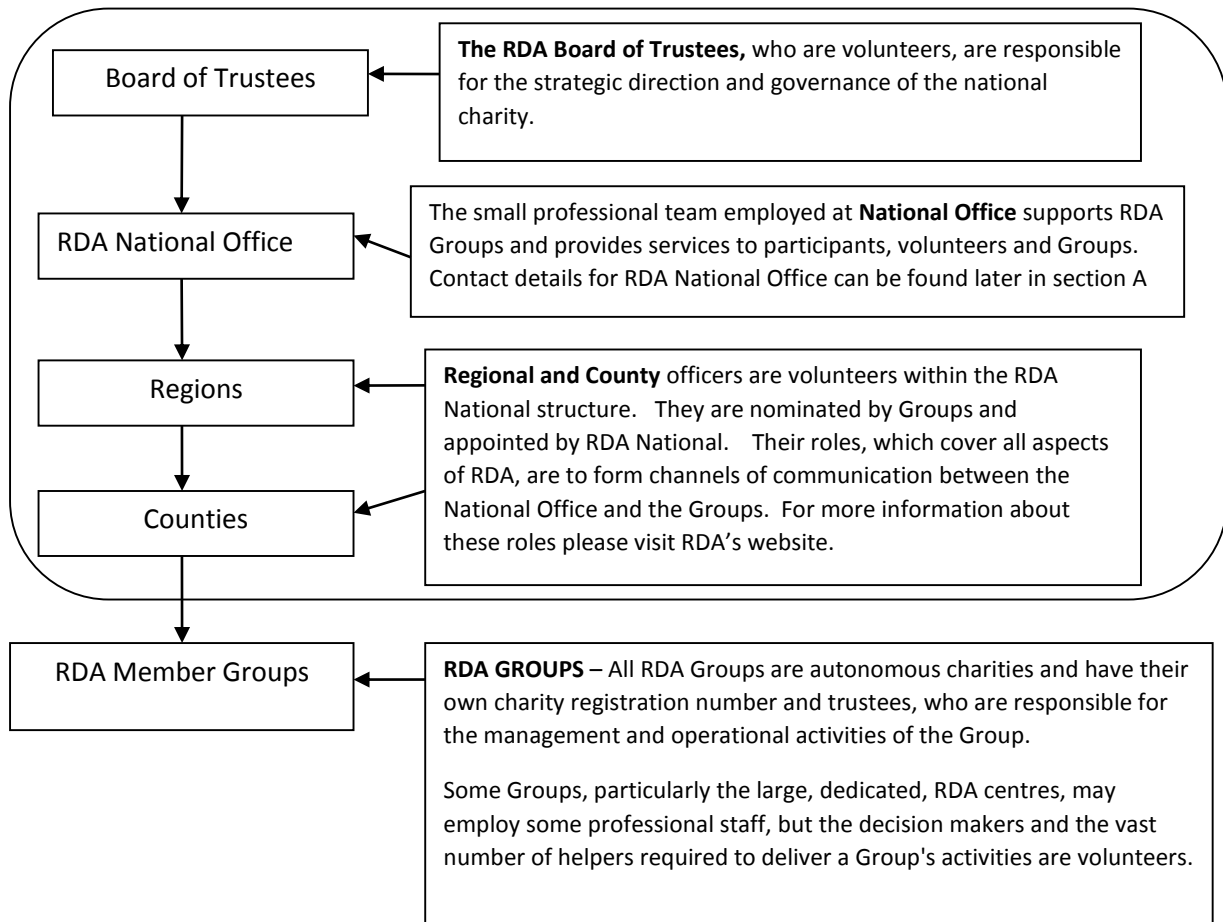


## Facts & Figures

	2010/11	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Groups	n/a	491	491	486
Total Participants	28000	28000	28000	28000
Horses	3100	n/a	n/a	3277
Total rides & drives	430000	n/a	n/a	n/a
Weekly sessions	3400	n/a	n/a	n/a
<b>Volunteers</b>	<b>18146</b>	<b>18000</b>	<b>19000</b>	<b>19000</b>

Table 2.1 Data from RDA Annual Review 2010, Handbooks 2013, 2014, Impact Report 2015

### 2.8.1.1 RDA National Structure



### 2.8.1.2 Regions and Counties

Suprastructures comprising County committees and Regional committees exist to support and facilitate the operation of Groups. Officials are entirely volunteers, and normally remain involved with their 'home' Group as well as the supra-level of responsibility. The structure of Regions and Counties mirror that of Groups and often provide signposting for enquiries from people new to RDA to Groups that have capacity and specialisms relevant to those enquiries.

### 2.8.1.3 Groups

RDA encourages autonomy at certain levels, so every Group operates independently of others, unless it chooses to do otherwise. Groups are encouraged to meet together, but in practice the opportunity to meet is rare. Large Centres meet occasionally to exchange ideas

and best practice; this might cover one-third of the groups across the UK. Counties are expected (by National Office) to meet with Regional Chairmen on a quarterly basis. Some regional officials are appointed by National Office and others are elected, therefore they have to work more closely with National Office than the County Chairs, who are elected by their Groups. Regional Chairs attend meetings three times a year with National Office, but informal communication tends to be much more frequent. Communication is mostly downward, and it has been established by previous research (Brooke-Holmes, 2005; Soltau, 2006) that there are often breaks in the chain of communication, so Groups, for instance, may not get all the information they need. Furthermore, each region has a committee of volunteers, and – especially at Group level – there are frequent ‘bottlenecks’ of information, which prevent all volunteers being aware of important information. The wider implementation of internet technology and communication is addressing this difficulty over time. National Office has increasingly moved to an internet-based platform for corporate documents, e-learning training and widely needed information. This is becoming much more accepted and used as such technology reaches wider audiences.

Groups, being legally and financially independent, quickly develop their own identities and cultures. They can become resistant to ‘meddling’ from other levels in the chain. Because it is at Group level that the ‘participant’ interacts with RDA, they have power and influence over the public face of RDA – for many participants (equally, for many volunteers), the Group is all they know of RDA and events such as the National Championships come as a shock when they see so many other riders, drivers and vaulters, Groups and other volunteers.

Groups vary in size from the ‘one woman and her pony’ variety, operating in a borrowed field, all the way through to large commercial enterprises with full-time staff and extensive facilities. Large centres are encouraged to share best practice with other Groups, but often there is little interaction of this sort for the smaller Groups. No study has been undertaken

to ascertain whether the participant perceives differences between volunteer- and professionally-run Groups; the experience of the *volunteer* has been examined and little difference was found (Brooke-Holmes, 2005), although a larger scale investigation may show some distinctions, in management and development opportunities particularly.

#### *2.8.1.4 Ownership of roles*

RDA as an organisation has evolved over many years and grown in many directions, but it has never lost the ethos demonstrated of inclusion and service which characterises it. People who work with animals are often practical and task-focussed; that is the nature of working with unpredictable animals and these attributes have become the hallmark of RDA. Culture has been described as ‘the way things are done around here’ (Deal & Kennedy, 1992) – we see the strong or weak influence of organisational culture all around us. Where a strong culture is present in an organisation, it indicates that there will be established patterns of behaviour and attitudes and clear expectations of others in the organisation. Within RDA, there are very clear ‘norms’ of behaviour established and expected: a clear ‘RDA type’ of person and dress exists, and the term is sometimes used – somewhat pejoratively - by people outside the RDA community but within the ‘horse world’ (that is, with knowledge of RDA) as a descriptor. This artefact of culture exists in spite of the variety of suitable clothing now available to the ‘outside’ or ‘horsey’ person; it describes more than mere appearance: it has become a shorthand description of an attitude to life and activity. Being an ‘RDA person’ requires a willingness to do silly or demanding things for a common cause: part of the basic assumptions of culture suggested by Schein (1985). As an example, during the National Championships in 2013, a group of ladies were about to go out in the pouring rain to collect score sheets but had no wet weather clothing handy, so made do with RDA carrier bags on their heads. The pink t-shirts they wore were that year’s ‘Championships t-shirts’, a sign of ‘belonging’, proudly worn by all volunteers all weekend. Many volunteers have the entire collection of t-shirts from all the years of the Championships, no matter how violent the

colour; most t-shirts are still in regular service and appear at RDA events throughout the country. Belonging is very important to RDA people; the sense of 'family' or 'friendship' comes up time and again as a reason for staying when the going gets tough. This is emphasised by Stebbins in his work on serious leisure, as explored earlier in this chapter. It might therefore be suggested that there is a strong social ethos to the culture of RDA. In addition, the mores of behaviour within the organisation demonstrate shared patterns of thinking, values, and understanding which set volunteers within RDA apart from volunteers in any other organisation very clearly.

#### *2.8.1.5 Social environment*

Given that the original 'ladies' of RDA came from a particular socio-economic and class background, it is not surprising that strong cultural norms grew up around the organisation. That demographic is no longer so strong, however, as RDA has recruited volunteers from other sources and increasingly uses young volunteers to support its activities. In 2015, RDA could boast that one in five of its 19,000 volunteers were under 25 years of age (RDA, 2015). Therefore it is perhaps surprising that the culture remains much as it was in the 1970s. The stability of the culture has been the cause of difficulty as RDA has sought to modernise and professionalise over the last 10 years or so but it remains as stable as ever. This is particularly visible when talking to Group Organisers about the role of National Office and the changes required of the way they perform their roles. Whilst the more 'national' volunteers have been content to move with a moderately altered culture, this remains a sticking point for many Groups. As 'Group' is where the services are delivered, this culture is the one which becomes visible to those outside RDA. For a time, it was thought that this may be preventing the recruitment of new volunteers but research for RDA (Soltau, 2006) suggests that it does not hinder people coming in. Indeed, the findings of that study also suggested that a strong and recognisable culture might be seen as a help in recruiting and retaining people – almost that if they know what to expect, they are more comfortable from the beginning.

### 2.8.2 People structure – Volunteers

The assertion that *'volunteers are not as dependant on their organizations as are employees, and their independence ... leads to less volunteer subordination to the system of organizational behaviour'* (Pearce, 1993:128) establishes the requirement for a separate area for the study of volunteers. Not simply 'unpaid workers', volunteers have specific reasons for wanting to be involved with the activities they spend time doing.

Pearce (1993:8) examines 'the problem of heterogeneity of settings for volunteer work'; volunteers usually experience multiple roles (p29); 'blurring of boundaries' between formal and informal control may be either 'liberating' or create uncertainty for volunteers, further complicating the experience of volunteering; 'the behavioural settings in which volunteers work can vary tremendously' along a continuum from 'extremely bureaucratic' (Weber's 1968 legal-rational authority) to value-rational ("peripheral, unstructured and confused" Rothschild-Whitt, 1979; Knoke & Prensky 1982).

### 2.8.3 Length of tenure

Volunteers at all levels in RDA show characteristic long-service. Casual observation and previous work suggests similar motivations for volunteers, regardless of time served but becoming more polarised with time; however, this is an area which could valuably be further explored. An understanding especially of the 'psychological contract' of volunteers may enable RDA to tailor management techniques more specifically to the different *types* of volunteer. Whilst the specificity of case study research is acknowledged, this understanding may be generalisable to other voluntary organisations because of the variety of roles carried out by volunteers within RDA.

### 2.8.4 Skills bases and training

It is interesting to see that where people function in a variety of roles, they move easily between roles and others are comfortable with dealing with people at different levels. A number of volunteers wear several 'hats': Regional Chair, Instructor and Trustee for instance, each requiring interaction with similar people but for different roles, and yet few seem to perceive this to present a challenge in terms of their relationships or authority. For such a traditional and hierarchical organisation, exemplifying Handy's 'role culture', this is an interesting example of the flexibility expected of volunteers.

## 2.9 Conclusions on RDA

The above overview of RDA has demonstrated the size and scope of the organisation and has discussed the structure and activities in which it engages as a background for the study reported in this thesis. As a large, people-centred organisation, it wields a great deal of influence over its volunteers and salaried employees, from whom it engenders significant loyalty and enthusiasm. Furthermore, it has a notable external profile. As Figure 2.1 shows, RDA impacts many lives each year, with associated improvements in quality of life for those participants. It is a recipient of regular grants and charitable donations from many sources, further underlining the esteem in which it is held by a large proportion of the 'horse world' and the wider influence it is able to claim.

As a location for a study of sport volunteers, therefore, RDA is a valuable resource. The next chapter will introduce psychological contract theory before the structure of the study itself is introduced.

### 3 – The Psychological Contract of Volunteers

The psychological contract has a long history in the academic literature of organisational behaviour and human resource management. It is widely spoken of and commonly used as a management tool by HRM practitioners; Conway and Briner (2005:17) suggest that more than twenty articles dedicated to the psychological contract have appeared in *People Management* magazine over the years. This suggests that practitioners and Human Resource professionals accept the value of the concept, and that it has an innate conceptual attractiveness to people who might reasonably consider themselves ‘experts’ when it comes to managing human (working) relationships. Unlike many concepts which are commonly accepted, however, it seems that no clear understanding of the concept exists and that there is little agreement amongst researchers and practitioners as to what the psychological contract actually *is*. This situation is compounded by the existence of several ‘key’ definitions and a wealth of papers which look at different aspects of the concept – without first clarifying the concept itself. This chapter will follow the development of the concept and explore where the inconsistencies lie and how they might be navigated to create a workable understanding of the psychological contract in order to use it effectively in this study.

There are multiple definitions of the psychological contract, and little general agreement about factors which form the contract. Early work (Argyris, 1960, Levinson et al., 1962) suggests a group perception of work, formed by experience and practice, and mediated by a foreman who is a former member of the work group, whereas the work of Rousseau (1989, 1990, 1994) demands an individual understanding of explicit promises made between ‘the organisation’ (the term being only vaguely defined) and the employee.



### 3.1 Definitions and understandings

Within the differing schools of thought on the psychological contract, propounded by Argyris, Schein and Rousseau for example, there are also different emphases on its value to the various parties to the contract. For the early writers, it was a collective agreement, formed by workers which defined elements of working practice and organisational culture, whilst for more recent writers – Rousseau and those following her – it has been understood largely as an expression of promises made and mutually understood; a way for management to influence the behaviour of their staff. Rousseau suggests, “Psychological contracts have the power of self-fulfilling prophecies: they can create the future ... Psychological contracts function in the broader context of goals and as such, *ceteris paribus* (all things being equal), make individuals and organisations more productive” (1995:9). Understanding the psychological contract in varying organisational contexts and with different types of parties to that contract therefore should add to the understanding of how the concept is formed and structures interactions between organisations and individuals. If, as Rousseau posits, it is fundamentally a management tool to control the behaviour of workers, it will have a different impact on volunteers to that which it has on employees; if this is not the case, and it is shown to be something other than a management tool of control, the impact may be strong on the organisation itself.

With this background explained, it begins to become clear that the literature on the psychological contract is far from being cohesive and logically developed. On the contrary, the ‘body’ of literature is disjointed and lacks agreement on even basic definitions. Whilst this leaves plenty of room for interpretation, it does present challenges to the researcher in locating new work in the existing knowledge.

### 3.1.1 The Historical Discourse

#### 3.1.1.1 *The group construct – Argyris*

The first writer to explicitly explore the idea of an implicit understanding between workers and their managers was Argyris (1960). For Argyris, the ‘psychological work contract’ was the result of a specific work culture and leadership style. His observations were carried out in an organisation where the ‘managers’ (‘foremen’ in his terms) had grown into their roles by coming up through the ‘ranks’ of the work structure. They were former members of the group, and therefore had authenticity in their role. Roehling (1997) suggests that

“[Argyris] observed that the foremen at a plant in which he was conducting field research had a “passive” or “understanding” leadership style. [He] attributed this to the fact that all of the foremen had come up through the ranks, and in the process, they had been influenced by the informal employee culture. As a result, the foremen realized that the way to get the employees to behave in the desired manner was to maintain the informal employee culture and not to behave in a way that violates the culture’s norms. Argyris hypothesized that one result of the passive or understanding leadership style was an employee-management relationship that was “dominated” by the “psychological work contract”.

Argyris (1960:97) described the “psychological work contract” thus:

“Since the foremen realize that this system will tend to produce optimally under passive leadership, and since the employees agree, a relationship may be hypothesized to evolve between the employees and the foremen which might be called the “psychological work contract”. The employee will maintain the high production, low grievances, etc., if the foreman guarantees and respect the norms of the employee informal culture (i.e., let the employees alone, make certain they make adequate wages, and have secure jobs)”

Therefore, as Roehling (1997) discusses, the main factors influencing the formation of the psychological work contract were the informal employee culture; the shared values and “relevant predispositions” brought by the employees to the workplace. These employees are the ‘workers’, who shared norms of behaviour and understanding of their roles; foremen were merely ‘ex-members of this group’. Nichols (2011) observed that the ‘psychological contract’ Argyris wrote about was in fact a *group* psychological contract: it reflected an implicit agreement between members of a work group about what they would or would not accept from their foreman. These important issues are not picked up in other work on the psychological contract but are issues which will be discussed later in the thesis. Another

aspect of this definition which seems particularly interesting in the context of the current study is Argyris' reference to "passive leadership", implying a mutual acceptance of the expertise of the group being lead and a gentler style of management than that often seen at the time this work was written – a time when the doctrine of Scientific Management had a firm hold in the large industrial manufacturing organisations which dominated the international economy. The idea of employees being 'let alone' to do their jobs and given security of tenure is a high trust position and a far cry from working conditions commonly in existence in mass-production industries at this time. The dominant working conditions were parodied in the classic 1936 Chaplin film 'Modern Times': high levels of management control, low levels of autonomy and extensive task focus were considered to be the way to achieve profit, and thereby success, for the organisation. It may be that the social norms of industrial organisation precluded serious consideration of Argyris' ideas, and it is possible that they may even have been actively ignored by the scholars of the time because they did not fit with the dominant paradigm of economic and industrial development.

Published a couple of years after Argyris, Levinson et al. (1962) conducted research in a 'large utility company', in a project funded by the Menninger Foundation. In their study of the history of the psychological contract, Roehling explains,

"... they observed that when people spoke about their work, they spoke of expectations, and that these expectations seemed to have an obligatory quality, "as if the company were duty-bound to fulfil them" (p. 20). This observation, they report, reminded them of Karl Menninger's (1958) discussion of the intangible aspects of contractual relationships, out of which they evolved the concept of the psychological contract." (1997:208)

#### *3.1.1.2 Levinson & Schein – early modern thinking*

This 'psychological contract' was later defined as:

"a series of mutual expectations of which the parties to the relationship may not themselves be [but] dimly aware but which nonetheless govern their relationship to each other'. (Levinson et al, 1962: 21)

Levinson et al considered that the 'components' of the psychological contract consisted of the expectations of both parties, and that acceptance of the components by each party was tacitly agreed. Furthermore, they suggested that these 'mutual expectations' had two characteristics: 1) they are largely implicit and unspoken and 2) they frequently antedate the relationship of the person and the company. (Roehling, 1997:207).

Schein was the next writer to consider the psychological contract. In 1965, he published his first thoughts about the psychological contract thus:

"The notion of a psychological contract implies that the individual has a variety of expectations of the organization and that the organization has a variety of expectations of him. These expectations not only cover how much work is to be performed for how much pay, but also involve the whole pattern of rights, privileges, and obligations between worker and organizations. For example, the worker may expect the company not to fire him after he has worked for a certain number of years and the company may expect that the worker will not run down the company's public image or give away company secrets to competitors. Expectations such as these are not written into any formal agreement between employer and organization, yet they operate powerfully as determinants of behaviour." (Schein, 1965, p. 11)

There was a small debate through the management studies area during the 1970s regarding the concept of the psychological contract: Kotter (1973) discussed the emergence of 'incongruent' expectations between employee and employer, thus at least marking out the foundations for later work around the issues of breach and violation of the contract. He suggested that, where parties to the PC have "mismatched" expectations, problems in the relationship may arise. Mismatches may be positive or negative; that is, any form of imbalance in expectations, regardless of which party is considered to 'benefit'. On the other hand, he suggested, where the expectations were generally "matched", greater job satisfaction, productivity and reduced turnover could be seen. This supported his definition of the PC as "an implicit contract between an individual and his organisation which specifies what each expects to give and receive from the other in their relationship." (1973:92) Kotter is the first author to refer to 'specificity' in expectations, again paving the way for varying interpretations through the later discourse on the psychological contract. It is, however, not clear from his work how Kotter understands specificity in an implicit context.

Schein developed his definition to the following (1978), which has become one of the 'classic' definitions in the field:

“a set of unwritten reciprocal expectations between an individual employee and the organization.”

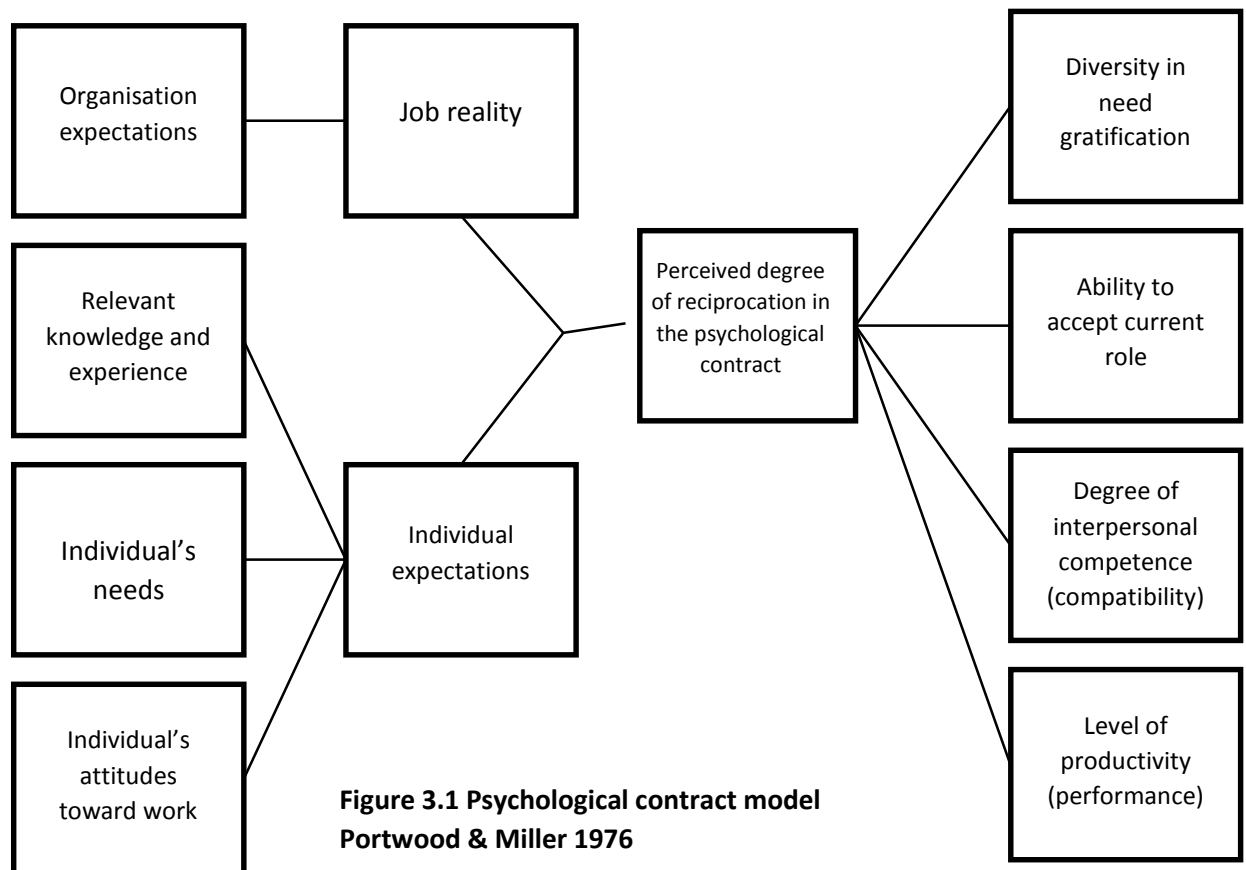
For Argyris, Levinson et al. and Schein, the psychological contract is considered to be reciprocal understanding of mutual expectations, which sets this early work apart from later conceptualisations. For all of these writers, the expectations within the psychological contract are implicit and dependent on the work group and/or social environment for their formation, change and continuation.

Schein suggests that,

“individual employees forge their expectations from their inner needs, what they have learned from others, traditions and norms which may be operating, their past experiences, and “a host of other sources” (1980, p. 24).

Levinson et al. 'identified a number of different types of employee expectations, both unconsciously and consciously held, that may make-up the employee's side of the PC. Unconscious expectations included those having to do with psychological issues, such as nurturance. They also identified more explicit expectations having to do with job performance, the use of specific skills, social relations in the work place, job security and economic rewards.' (Roehling, 1997:207). Both these writers suggest agreement with Argyris' work, where he posited that an important component of the formation of the psychological contract was the 'informal employee culture' – shaped by employees' "predispositions": these may be shaped by the workplace or factors outside the workplace, although the extent of influence of each setting was 'uncertain'. Indeed, we can assert that the extent of influence of these factors remains 'uncertain' today, a theme picked up much later by Dick (2006). Richard, McMillan-Capehart, Bhuian and Taylor (2009) considered the role of organisational culture in the formation of psychological contracts, concluding that hierarchical or clan cultures are positively associated with the establishment of either

transactional or relational typologies of the psychological contract. This work, which is firmly embedded in what has been called the 'post-Rousseau' discourse (Nichols, 2013), is nevertheless useful in confirming the suggestions of the early writers that formative influences on the psychological contract may come from either inside or outside the organisation, and may be influenced by factors internal or external to the employee themselves. Levinson et al.'s second 'characteristic', that the expectations forming the psychological contract may 'antedate the employment relationship' is particularly prescient in this context: with this small comment, they make the point that although it is a set of expectations within a relationship, the psychological contract in effect "comes with" the employee to the work environment through their own social construction of their environment and attitudes, and is then superimposed with values and expectations created by the relationship with colleagues, managers and the organisation. Portwood and Miller (1976) even created a diagram of their psychological contract model which suggests a good number of factors external to those purely encountered in the employment relationship.



### 3.1.2 Rousseau's reinvigoration – definitions and ontology

The year 1989 marked a turning point in the history of the psychological contract. It was then that Denise Rousseau's first paper on the subject was published. For Rousseau, and most who have written on the concept since, the work preceding them seems to have slipped under the radar. It is notable that her 1995 book on psychological contracts in organisations does not make more than a brief mention of the aforementioned writers.

Rousseau set out a definition of the psychological contract thus:

“an individual's beliefs regarding the terms and conditions of a reciprocal exchange agreement between the focal person and another party. Key issues here include the belief that a promise has been made and a consideration offered in exchange for it, binding the parties to some set of reciprocal obligations” (1989:123).

Rousseau's interest in the psychological contract, and the debate she began, popularised the concept and brought it into common awareness. In the 1980's and 90's, a period when

capitalist thinking was possibly at its strongest in the Western developed nations at least, the psychological contract appeared to offer managers a way to ‘influence’ the behaviour of their employees. The twenty or so articles which have appeared in People Management are but the tip of the iceberg: a quick ‘Google’ search generates over 10 million references to the concept, suggesting that it is an attractive management tool – although it is also frequently commented that the concept is incompletely understood, might more correctly be referred to as a ‘philosophy’ and is very difficult to apply as a ‘tool’.

The majority of papers published following Rousseau’s reinvigoration of the concept have concentrated on the relationship between the employer and employee. The psychological contract has been seen predominantly as the province of the work relationship and attention has been distributed widely across a number of areas. Key topics in the general field of ‘psychological contract’ include:

- parties to the psychological contract
- content of the psychological contract
- formation (or ‘structural signals’) of the psychological contract
- breach and violation
- changes in the psychological contract.

These areas – and their key contributions this review – will be considered below. It is noted that very little has been published considering either philosophical aspects of the psychological contract, or methodological approaches to the research.

### 3.1.3 Post Rousseau – individualisation and a product of the times

Rousseau’s assertion that the psychological contract is based on promises made by both parties is the key differentiator of her work, and is very much at odds with the earlier discourse examined above. She suggests that the psychological contract – rather than being the ‘unspoken expectations’ written about in earlier work – is in fact a ‘promissory’ agreement between parties to an employment relationship. Whilst Rousseau’s work forms the base for many more recent papers, most of them take issue with the ‘promissory’ nature



in some way: Freese and Schalk (2008) take an approach to the psychological contract based more on the work of Argyris (1960), although clearly Rousseau also has an important influence on them, as seen in the reference to the individual:

“a psychological contract is literally psychological. That is to say, it is by definition an individual perception” (p270).

Allowing the psychological contract to be ‘decided’ by the individual makes possible the analysis which has been carried out on it: if it is purely promissory, then an individual’s assessments of the extent of fulfilment or breach cannot be influenced by factors other than those promises made (and verbalised) between employer and employee. This is a clear departure from the suggestion of Levinson et al. (1962) that the expectations forming the psychological contract are implicit and unspoken.

Debate has arisen as to the difference between the psychological contract and the employment contract: if reciprocal expectations are based on promises (Rousseau & Tijoriwala, 1998), it becomes hard to tell where the ‘psychological’ contract ends and the ‘actual’ contract begins. Grimmer and Oddy (2007) argue that the employer has an important role in managing the expectations of the employee:

“many of the reasons [for breach or violation of the psychological contract] given concerned the employer renegeing on promises made during recruitment and induction, as well as the employer not meeting initial expectations regarding career opportunities ...” (p165)

For them, therefore, both explicit promise and implicit expectation are equally part of the construction of the psychological contract. Grimmer and Oddy suggest also that the psychological contract is formed during recruitment and induction – and therefore it is not affected by the structural factors identified by Portwood and Miller (1976) or changed by signals occurring later in the employee’s experience of their employment. Therefore, by their approach, the formation of the psychological contract is a fixed event rather than an ongoing reflection of a relationship. This view is clearly at odds with the understanding of other writers, who discuss the effect of formative and structural signals in both social and

employment contexts on the psychological contract, and, in a few studies, the impact of time on its content.

As suggested above, Rousseau is clear in some of her writings that the psychological contract cannot be influenced by factors outside the employment relationship: an assertion which directly contradicts Levinson et al. (1962) and Portwood and Miller (1976), and which is not unquestioningly supported by later writers. Fox (1974) suggested that *'earlier literature on the psychological contract illustrates the point that employment relationships are shaped as much by a social as well as an economic exchange'*. However, if – as Rousseau suggests – the psychological contract is purely a result of 'promises' made by the employer and the employee, it is entirely reasonable to suggest that its 'sources' are internal to the organisation. However, Lester et al. (2007) suggest that *'prior employment and organizational experiences help shape and create the lenses through which employees perceive their contract. Newcomers bring their previous experiences to the organization and these preconceived notions can be either revised or augmented during their period of socialization and tenure with the firm (Thomas & Anderson, 1998)'*. This tension between the views of Rousseau, early writers and more recent literature suggests that there is scope for some new work to redefine the concept as a whole and to identify where and how the psychological contract is formed, nurtured and ended. Moreover, it is notable that empirical work has been carried out on widely differing samples – and with diverse methodologies – which may have affected the findings and understandings we currently have. It may be that our understanding of these factors is actually contextual and dependent on the type of person we are considering, their employment situation and their social factors. This is considered in more detail in section 4.2.2 below.

Cullinane and Dundon (2006) suggest that early approaches to psychological contract research focussed on social exchange theory. To a large extent, excepting Dick (2006), this view has been ignored in recent years. As Culliane and Dundon suggest,

“much of the literature post-Rousseau has followed a similar path by focussing primarily on the individual’s understanding of explicit and implicit promises regarding contributions.”  
(2006:116)

Dick (2006) refers to ‘structural signals’ in the organisation as forces of change on the psychological contract. These may be factors originating from the organisation of the hierarchy, relationships with peers at work or, for example, downsizing or recruitment. It has also been recognised (Levinson et al., 1962; Schein, 1965; Dick, 2006) that factors external to the work environment may affect the way an employee sees their role and relationship to the organisation, thus allowing for ‘social signals’ to influence the psychological contract in the same way – this may be seen when an employee’s family circumstances change, for instance, leading to a ‘downsizing’ of their commitment to the role. Lester et al. (2007) however, explicitly deny the role of ‘other’ factors in the creation of the psychological contract; in their (quantitative) measurement of changes in the employees’ perception of their employment contract, they measure only factors related directly to the job, rather than other possibly formative influences such as personal commitments to family or hobby and so on. This disagreement demonstrates the complexity of using the psychological contract as a framework for analysis, as there is little commonality within the literature on which to base our thinking. The complexity, however, does not reduce the value of the concept, but rather demands that we define clearly how we understand the ‘conceptual lens’ through which we are looking and ensure that it is appropriate to the situation we are seeking to understand.

### 3.1.4 Applications in employment

Cullinane and Dundon (2006) note that Guest (1998) '*emphasised the two-way exchange of reciprocity. He [Guest] also challenges Rousseau's 'anthropomorphic identity' of organisations as employers*'. The question 'who is the psychological contract with?' has vexed writers continuously. Studies variously suggest that employees hold their PC with the foreman or immediate line manager as an individual (Argyris, 1960; Levinson et al., 1962), 'employers' (unspecified parties who are associated with the employing company) (Robinson & Rousseau, 2006; Robinson, 1996; Robinson, Kraatz & Rousseau, 1994; Roehling, 1997; Arnold, 1996), 'the organisation' (Morrison & Robinson, 1997; Guest, 1998; Anderson & Schalk, 1998; Herriot, Manning & Kidd, 1997; Shore & Tetrick, 1994), 'managers' (representatives of the employer) (Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler, 2000; Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler, 2002; Guest & Conway, 2006), or 'another party' (Rousseau, 1998; Rousseau & Tijoriwala, 1998). This variation is confusing and emphasises the lack of coherence in research on the concept of the psychological contract. If such a contract is understood to be 'reciprocal', and yet there is no agreement as to who is reciprocating, the existence of the contract becomes even less clear. In providing organisations with an 'anthropomorphic identity' that allows many actors to be understood as one actor with a consistent value and moral base and set of expectations, Rousseau simplifies the creation of the psychological contract. This position, however, leaves the employee vulnerable – as the myriad definitions of the party to the contract identified above shows – with little clarity on who they should be dealing with in forming their psychological contract. This is an area for further research, as has been noted by many of the above writers.

### 3.1.5 Does the Psychological Contract Vary with Time or Role?

Studies on the psychological contract in employees (Conway & Briner, 2002; Lester & Kickul, 2007; De Vos, Buyens & Schalk, 2007; Tekelab, Takeuchi & Taylor, 2005; Morrison &

Robinson, 1997) suggest that the psychological contract develops in an employee's first few months and changes occur based on their integration into the corporate culture, understandings of the expectations of staff and treatment by the contracting party. Factors influencing such change are not unanimously agreed and these studies have not followed subjects over more than a period of a few months, two years at most. There is therefore little conclusive evidence for or against the development of the psychological contract over time. This is another area for further work – intuitively, it seems likely that the content of such a contract might change as an individual progresses in their job and understands the organisation better. Work on breach and violation of the psychological contract – discussed below in 3.1.7 – comes closest to exploring change over time, but only from the perspective of unsatisfactory outcomes.

### 3.1.6 Transactions, Relations and Ideologies

The attractive simplicity of Argyris' early work on the psychological contract was overlaid with debate and complication by Rousseau's (1990) introduction of 'elements' of the psychological contract, although deeper classification has created more analysis potential and increased the value of the concept to its users. The Ideological aspects were added later (Thompson & Bunderson, 2003), with specific relevance to value-imbued work redolent of the kind considered in this study.

In Rousseau's 1998 paper, three approaches to measuring the psychological contract – content (most common; terms and obligations), feature (properties of the contract) and evaluation (individual's assessment of contract) measures - are compared. Rousseau's (1995) work suggested that psychological contracts may be divided into two types: 'relational', which signifies a longer-term commitment to the organisation, with higher expectations of commitment and trust or 'transactional', where there is an expectation of a shorter term or lower commitment relationship (typical of a fixed term worker with no

expectation of subsequent renewal of the employment contract). These concepts are important to allow the use of the psychological contract as a management tool – which, as shown earlier, has been widely demanded by human resource professionals.

It is important here to define what researchers in this area have defined as salient aspects of transactional and relational psychological contracts. The table below presents some factors mentioned by Rousseau (1990) in this section for ease of reference.

	<b>Transactional Elements</b>	<b>Relational Elements</b>
<b>Focus</b>	Economic, extrinsic	Economic and Non-economic, socio-emotional, intrinsic
<b>Timeframe</b>	Close-ended, specific	Open-ended, indefinite
<b>Stability</b>	Static	Dynamic
<b>Scope</b>	Narrow	Pervasive
<b>Tangibility</b>	Public, observable	Subjective, understood
	Table 3.1 Elements of the psychological contract	

The implications of table 3.1 above are that the elements to be found in an employee’s psychological contract are quite stable, depending on the type of contract they are employed on, the clarity of the task they are engaged in, the culture of the organisation and perhaps the type of organisation they are in. Rousseau suggests that, in Miles and Snow’s (1980) terms, ‘make’ companies are more likely to have employees with relational, longer-term orientation psychological contracts, whereas ‘do’ companies, with their short-term focus, are more likely to see transactional, instant gratification type psychological contracts. Later work has shown, however, that the distinction is not so clear-cut and it is normal for employees to have elements of both types of psychological contract contemporaneously.

Lester et al. (2007), describe the definitions they used in their work thus:

“The relational description read, ‘The terms of the employee–employer relationship are more open-ended, the duration of the relationship is seen as more long-term. The terms of the relationship are both monetary and non-monetary with a greater emphasis on the social and emotional connections that exist. There is stability in the benefits offered and the

relationship in general because the company rewards loyalty and commitment to the firm and the employees identify with their organization.'

The transitional description read, 'The employee–employer relationship that used to exist at this organization has eroded. Due to dramatic changes in the organization (e.g., downsizing, restructuring, attempts to respond to competitive pressures), the company no longer offers commitments regarding future employment. The relationship is highly ambiguous and marked by uncertainty. The company is offering some benefits that suggest their employees are interchangeable and disposable (e.g., declining wages, severance packages) while at the same time offering other benefits (e.g., performance and retention bonuses) that suggest the employees are indispensable to the success of the organization.'"

Several published studies attempt to analyse the content, features and evaluation of the psychological contract. Grimmer and Oddy (2007) used MBA students with work experience to test the applicability of the psychological contract in Australia. This is a discussion of the categorisation of an individual's psychological contract into either a transactional or relational contract. They emphasised the discussion of the reasons for the contract being one or the other, and the effect this may have on employees. Interestingly, they found no evidence that a transactional contract affected levels of trust in the organisation either positively or negatively, but they did find evidence that transactional contracts negatively correlated with intention to remain with the organisation. This suggests that short-term employment contracts are more likely to be associated with transactional (or 'reward based') psychological contracts; looked at the other way, we could suggest that an organisation which encourages transactional aspects to psychological contracts is hindering employees from developing a long-term relational commitment to their role as the two are negatively correlated.

Further developments in thinking have led to a third categorisation of the psychological contract – that of the 'ideological' approach. This has been led by Bunderson (2001) and Thompson & Bunderson (2003), who suggest that commitment to an organisation whose cause mirrors personal belief and values provides a 'third way' for employees to develop psychological bonds with the organisation. Further, they suggest (2003) that a psychological contract with an ideological aspect becomes a much stronger vehicle for creating employee commitment than a purely transactional or relational contract. When the psychological

contract has some ideology included, it becomes much more robust in the mind of the employee – that is, they will overlook many negative influences which might otherwise cause weakness in the contract because they feel a shared value base or identity with the organisation. Conversely, when an ideological commitment can be identified, it may be that an employee perceives damage to their psychological contract when something the organisation does affects the value base the contract is based upon. Therefore, whilst potentially creating a more stable psychological contract, the ideological aspect may also create situations where damage is caused to an individual’s psychological contract by a third party and without any direct effect on the individual themselves. An example of this might be where an organisation which claims strong environmental credentials, and attracts employees who share this value set, is discovered to be polluting local rivers intentionally. At this juncture, although they are not directly affected, the employees may feel that the organisation has not upheld its’ ‘obligations’ to behave appropriately:

“... incorporating ideology into the psychological contract helps to explain why violation can occur in the absence of direct personal mistreatment and, conversely, why some employees may remain loyal to an organization despite breaches in the economic and socio-emotional aspects of the psychological contract.” (Thompson & Bunderson, 2003)

The ideological aspect of the psychological contract is inherently appealing to organisations; increasingly in recent years we have seen advertising campaigns run by commercial enterprises to emphasise the values that are ‘shared’ by the management, employees, customers and other stakeholders (Cross, 2013): such campaigns are targeted at least in part to increase the ‘buy-in’ by these stakeholders and therefore to increase the ideological aspect of their commitment to the organisation – with its’ attendant benefits – at little cost but maximum return. How much more does this apply in the voluntary sector where commitment to a cause is the driver of many volunteers and benefactors.

These three ‘aspects’ – relational, transactional and ideological – are important in allowing us to categorise aspects of a person’s psychological contract and begin to decode where and



how they see their relationship with the organisation starting and ending. To consistently apply the approaches gives the researcher a way of defining the content and scope of the employee's relationship with the employer. Work such as that done by Grimmer and Oddy (2007) makes a very clear distinction between short-term and long-term employees; the difference being much more than simply the length of a contract, but in fact representing the whole understanding of how they should interact with the organisation, the outcomes they can expect from their employment and what kind of actions they consider appropriate in the circumstances. Adding in the role of shared values – the 'ideological' aspect of the psychological contract – provides a very powerful analysis lever and gives leeway to employers to expect high levels of loyalty to their organisation, regardless of their behaviour which is not related to their values, so long as both parties remain committed to the values they espouse. This element of the psychological contract seems immediately to have applicability to RDA and is one which will be of interest to the study at hand.

### 3.1.7 Breach and violation

When the expectations of either party in a psychological contract are not met, the literature refers to violation or breach of the contract. This is by far the most popular area for research in the psychological contract literature; perhaps because it is the most easily identified and understood aspect of the concept. Whilst the terms are used interchangeably by some authors (Grimmer & Oddy, 2007), it is clear from the work of Freese and Schalk, (2008), Morrison and Robinson (1997), Thompson and Bunderson (2003) and Robinson and Rousseau (1994) that they are generally considered to be quite different things:

"Breach refers to the 'cognition that one's organisation has failed to meet one or more obligations within one's psychological contract in a manner commensurate with one's contributions' and violation refers to 'the emotional and affective state that may under certain conditions follow from the belief that one's organisation has failed to adequately maintain the psychological contract' (Robinson and Morrison, 2000, p. 230)".

This definition suggests that failure to meet the expectations of the employee is not, *per se*, the end of the psychological contract, but may provide the opportunity for the employee to 'reframe' their understanding of the relationship and perhaps rectify unrealistic expectations. The balance of transactional, relational and ideological aspects – as discussed above – will influence the resilience of the psychological contract, the likelihood of breach or violation occurring and the impact of such action (Vantilborgh et al., 2014). The type of damage done will depend on the factors forming the contract in the first place and may also take into account 'structural signals' from inside and outside of the organisation. The response of an individual to potential breach or violation is individual and may not be easily predicted. The individual's response to breach or violation of their psychological contract is predicated on the balance in that contract between the transactional, relational and ideological aspects. Many studies show that the more relational the psychological contract, the more resilient it is likely to be to breach, but Grimmer and Oddy (2007) suggest that violation becomes more common in the relational contract. A psychological contract which encompasses strong ideological aspects may demonstrate further resilience still, even to violation, as individuals value the commitments to shared values more highly than their own comfort within that relationship.

The context in which people exist has a strong influence on their understanding of their situation, and nowhere is this clearer than when we try to identify the tacit understandings people have of their own activities. Casser and Briner (2009) suggest that the social norms of society influence the development of the psychological contract: the more socially cohesive the society, the more they expect the content of the psychological contract to emphasise social cohesion. Cullinane & Dundon (2006) are critical of attempts to 'capture' the psychological contract, arguing that it cannot be defined (that is, all attempts to analyse it are based on varying measures and definitions), and that therefore context will *always* influence understanding:

“until some of these ignored sources [of influence on the psychological contract] are grappled with, studies searching for the attainment of a healthy psychological contract may be pursuing a lost cause in search of an organisational chimera” (2006:117)

The discussion above demonstrates that there are significant differences of opinion within the academic discourse on the psychological contract; indeed it may be asked whether all these authors are actually writing about the same concept – and if so, why no-one has attempted to synthesise the myriad definitions and approaches into something all can agree on. This situation does not make it easy for the researcher looking at the psychological contract, leaving far more questions about the concept being explored than it generates answers. As we shall see below, work using the concept has continued and expanded into fields other than pure business, and there is quite a body of literature now available, but the lack of agreed definitions and understandings of the concept create conflict and a lack of depth and rigour. It is beholden upon the individual researcher therefore to define their own terms and create the parameters within which they will explore the ideas of the psychological contract. Cullinane & Dundon’s elegantly phrased criticism above is no less true now than it was in 2006, and this is an area of concern for the academic world to address. Individual definitions are useful but it does seem that we are creating our own microcosms of understanding rather than addressing underlying universal concepts. This applies particularly when the psychological contract ‘theory’ is applied to complex new areas such as the study of volunteers.

### 3.2 Methodological considerations in the PC literature

In spite of a long and varied history, the methodological approaches to psychological contract research have shown two clear approaches which are generally temporally distinct. Within each period, they have not varied significantly. Early work, being descriptive and exploratory, was observational rather than analytical (Argyris, 1960; Levinson et al., 1962). This set out the parameters for the concept. However, Rousseau and much of the work which has been carried out on the psychological contract since has been done quantitatively

(Rousseau, 1989, 1990, 2001; Sels, Janssen & van den Brande, 2004; Shore and Tetrick, 1994). The emphasis on empirical approaches in the post-Rousseau discourse reflects the preferences of Rousseau and others, with their background in the behavioural sciences. The questionnaire or survey-based approaches which are most commonly used in these papers (Conway & Briner, 2005:90) allow the researcher to investigate large samples, typically from one organisation and at one time. These approaches lend themselves to measuring aspects of the phenomenon such as breach and content, thus explaining the emphasis on these areas in published literature. Most questionnaires focus on either content of the psychological contract or breach. In the case of content, multi-item measures are used, whereby employees rate pre-defined categories of items the researchers expect that they might find. For instance, high pay, merit pay, job security, training, overtime, loyalty (Robinson, Kraatz & Rousseau, 1994). There is little agreement in the literature on what measures should be used, so even in work on content, studies cover perceived obligations, perceptions of promises or commitments, and expectations. From these measures, scores are derived by calculating averages from the results generated by scoring on a 5- or 7-point scale, similar to a Likert scale. Limiting the potential responses of subjects of the research makes analysis more straightforward, but also restricts the axis of analysis to expected outcomes, framed always by the background and understanding of the researcher. It might be suggested that this factor alone limits the value of such an approach to understanding the psychological contract. Conway & Briner (2005:91) suggest that this variety of measured items in the research is *'a reflection of the weak theoretical understanding of how employees make sense of the contents of their psychological contracts'*.

Studies on breach share the operational challenges of studies on content. Many studies focus on fulfilment of the psychological contract, negatively scored, to expose breach or violation. For example, Robinson and Rousseau (1994) focussed on factors such as careerism orientation, trust, satisfaction and intention to remain, whilst Kickul, Lester and Finkl (2002)

focussed on the fulfilment of factors such as a competitive salary, meaningful work, participation in decision making and a reasonable workload. It could be argued that lack of fulfilment, as measured in such studies, might not be synonymous with breach. However, such a debate is outside the scope of this study. It does, however, demonstrate the difficulties encountered when considering the operationalisation of research in this area. The vast majority are cross-sectional, with one occurrence of data collection: thus providing a 'snapshot' at one point in time rather than being able to trace similarity or difference at different times. Notably, only a few studies have attempted to do the latter in a longitudinal study (Robinson, 1996; Robinson & Morrison, 2000). In each case, results of questionnaires have been statistically analysed using correlation and multiple regression tests to create quantitative results. This has contributed to the analysis to date presenting as disconnected and separated findings which have not contributed to a coherent examination of the phenomenon.

Furthermore, the samples used for many of the questionnaire studies were of conveniently selected subjects: groups of MBA students or recent graduates (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994; Robinson, Kraatz & Rousseau, 1994; Robinson & Morrison, 2000; Robinson & Rousseau, 2006), newly hired managers in one firm (Robinson, 1996) or local authority workers (Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler, 2002).

Only Conway and Briner (2002) have considered multiple variables in a study of part and full time employees in two different organisations, whilst Dick (2006) considered the effect on the psychological contract of the move from full to part time work in the police force.

In contrast to studies on employees, the few published studies on the psychological contract of volunteers have, in some cases, taken a more balanced approach to methods. These variously use a mixed method approach, combining focus groups and survey approaches (e.g. Farmer & Fedor, 1999; O'Donohue & Nelson, 2009; Stirling, Kilpatrick & Orpin, 2011)

and a qualitative approach (Taylor et al, 2006; Nichols & Ojala, 2009; Ralston, Downward, Lumsdon, 2004) or a Rousseau-inspired quantitative approach (Liao-Troth, 2001, 2005; Starnes, 2007). As discussed above, however, work on the interplay between the psychological contract and volunteers is severely restricted and therefore offers little guidance on the most appropriate methods.

### 3.3 The Psychological Contract in Volunteers

The origins of psychological contract theory, as argued above, are in conventional human resource management theory, and take for granted the explicit 'contract of employment' as the basis of analysis. Once we start to consider the application of this concept to volunteers, however, it can become complicated, if not a little problematic. The existence of a psychological contract in volunteers is widely accepted, as will be explored below, although this has only recently become an important area of research. Volunteers often do not have a 'contract of volunteering' on which to base their expectations (although this is becoming a much more accepted part of volunteer management techniques). This lack of an explicit set of role requirements and guidance gives freedom for volunteer roles to develop organically, which is often positive for both the volunteer and the organisation, but may create a lack of clarity around who volunteers should report to and what exactly they are expected to do. If volunteers are committed and long-term, such as those who are classed as engaged in serious leisure (see Chapter 2), these complications are further compounded by the expertise shown by volunteers and the 'ownership' they feel of the roles they have created. Therefore it may be argued that the psychological aspects of the experience are actually far more important for volunteers than they are for employees.

Work on volunteers and the psychological contract remains 'sparse' (Farmer and Fedor, 1999) although a small body of work does now exist. However, this is not comprehensive

and there remain large knowledge gaps to be filled. This section considers the papers which contribute most significantly to the work undertaken in this study.

Attempts to understand the psychological contract in volunteers have, in the main, been based upon Rousseau's conceptualisation of the PC, leaving aside the social exchange theory basis of the model postulated by Argyris (1960), and the questions of antecedence raised by Levinson et al. (1962). The latter points are key to our understanding of how we can – or should – apply the concept to volunteers. Later work following Rousseau (1989) forms the 'contemporary discourse', and bases its views on Rousseau's premise that any PC is 'promissory', and therefore takes less account of the influence of social environment, exchange theory, management example, the role of the group or previous experience of the person forming the psychological contract – in this case the volunteer – than does the work of the earlier discourse. As noted above though, this is not consistent across all the literature and a few writers are more prepared to take a constructionist approach to their research than others. This may explain the difficulties encountered by researchers who have sought to use the PC as an explanatory framework for volunteers' behaviour: the model is not designed to be used for volunteers and – in many cases – volunteers are not the recipients of clear contracts, role descriptors and defined recruitment and induction processes. Therefore, the explicit and promissory approach is bound to struggle in an environment where promises may not be given and parties to the agreement may be many and unclear.

The first paper to demonstrate that volunteers are capable of holding psychological contracts was Farmer and Fedor (1999). They explored the existence of transactional and relational elements in those psychological contracts, establishing that both can be evidenced, stating that *"volunteers' PCs are suggested to be more relational than transactional in nature"*. Kirkpatrick, Stirling and Orpin (2011) later reinforced the importance of relational aspects for volunteers, showing that recognition and support are of

importance for the maintenance of volunteers' psychological contract. They conclude that the fulfilling of relational expectations is positively linked to volunteer retention, whereas the lack of transactional expectations such as payment of out-of-pocket expenses has a negative impact. Liao-Troth (2001, 2005) applied existing conceptualisations of the psychological contract for paid employees to volunteers. His 2003 paper considered differences between paid workers and volunteers, drawing on the work of Pearce (1993) and alluding to the role of the psychological contract, although not explicitly extending psychological contract theory into this area. In his 2005 work, he assessed the interplay of motive and personality on volunteers' intention to stay in the organisation.

Developing work on the form of the psychological contract in volunteers, Starnes (2007) suggested that 'volunteers can develop psychological contracts with their not-for-profit organisations and perceive breaches of those contracts' – taking the commonly used theme of breach and violation into the realm of volunteers, whilst Nichols (2007) made the point that, in much of the 'conventional' literature on the psychological contract, it is seen as a tool to enhance management control rather than for the edification of the employee. For many volunteers this is a troublesome view: management is tolerated, but – particularly where their activity might be described as serious leisure – they often consider that they have expertise in their tasks (Pearce, 1993; Stebbins, 2007). This expertise may be considered by the volunteer to negate the requirement for management intervention in the task at all and therefore tools for 'control' are perhaps inappropriate.

Tracking the content of the psychological contract has been the subject of a small number of studies, both in employment (see 3.1.6 for some examples) and in volunteers. Ralston, Downward and Lumsdon (2004) identified particular criteria expected by volunteers as part of their psychological contract, and Nichols and Ojala (2009) separated obligations as either



organisational or volunteer. Taylor, Darcy and Hoye (2006) contrasting the expectations and perceived obligations of volunteers and club administrators.

Vantilborgh et al have been instrumental in identifying and exploring the importance of ideological attachments in the psychological contract of volunteers (2011, 2013). In particular, their use of critical incident technique – although not without problems, as explored further in Chapter Four – opened up the possibilities for qualitative investigation into the psychological contract of volunteers. In both papers, they show that ideological, or ‘value based’, aspects of the psychological contract are particularly salient to volunteers and discuss the effect of over- and under-fulfilment of obligations. Vantilborgh et al do not reference the work of Starnes (2007), in which she suggested that volunteers perceiving a breach of contract are unlikely to alter their intention to stay in the volunteer organisation. It is clear that an ideological attachment to the mission of the organisation would explain the resilience that Starnes demonstrates. This is important, as it suggests that volunteers are less responsive to breach of their psychological contracts than employees have been shown to be. Whilst not relieving voluntary organisations from responsibility for awareness of the psychological contract, Starnes’ work suggests that they may benefit from the increased resilience volunteers bring when they are committed to their volunteering for reasons other than tangible benefits. The driving factor for this resilience is often identified as ‘altruism’, but work such as that done by Hoye et al. (2008) and Coleman (2002) does not wholly support this hypothesis and points toward forms of self-interest as another reason for continuing to volunteer in the face of challenges. Starnes (2007) further suggested that volunteers’ age and length of time served in the organisation may influence their perceptions of breach and intentions to remain, whilst Coleman (2002) suggested that volunteers occupying more senior positions – team manager for instance – are likely to be older, commit more hours to the role and stay longer in the club.

Table 3.2 provides a brief summary of the key research in this area.

<b>Author (date)</b>	<b>Summary</b>
Farmer and Fedor (1999)	Established existence of psychological contract in volunteers, examining balance between transactional and relational aspects.
Liao-Troth (2001)	Differences between paid workers and volunteers. Alluded to role of psychological contract.
Ralston, Downward and Lumsdon (2004)	Identified volunteers' expectations as part of their psychological contract.
Liao-Troth (2005)	Interaction of motive and personality on volunteers' intention to stay in the organisation.
Taylor, Darcy and Hoye (2006)	Contrast expectations of volunteers and club administrators.
Nichols (2007)	Conflict created when psychological contract is viewed purely as a management tool. Contrasted with Pearce's (1993) position of volunteers as experts.
Starnes (2007)	Shows that volunteers can develop psychological contracts and perceive breaches of those contracts. Breach is unlikely to alter intention to stay in volunteer organisation.
Hoye et al (2008)	Psychological contract is related to volunteer motivation
Nichols and Ojala (2009)	Identified elements of the psychological contract as belonging to either the organisation or the volunteer.
O'Donohue & Nelson (2009)	Clear evidence of ideology-infused psychological contracts in volunteers engaged in the caring sector.
Stirling, Kilpatrick and Orpin (2011)	Volunteer retention is enhanced by the fulfilment of relational expectations but lack of transactional expectations has a negative impact.
Vantilborgh et al (2011a)	Value-based (ideological) aspects of psychological contract are particularly relevant to volunteers.
Vantilborgh et al (2013)	Effect on volunteers of over- and under-fulfilment of obligations in the psychological contract.
	Table 3.2 Summary of key work – Volunteers and the Psychological Contract

The contemporary discourse has some valuable contributions to make to the understanding of the psychological contract of the volunteer – concepts such as the

Transactional/Relational/Ideological aspects clearly contribute to the analysis potential and make more explicit the content and uses of the concept. However, the concept should not be looked at in a value-free way, and moreover, should be based on a consistent and rationalised explanation of what we are looking at. So far, as Roehling (1997) suggested, no-one has done this. Much of the research into the psychological contract of volunteers relies heavily on tools and techniques developed for research with employees (Liao-Troth (2005), for instance), and therefore the results may not be entirely relevant to volunteers due to their differing reasons for volunteering and the rewards they expect from the activity. Many of the papers discussed in this section make the assumption that the psychological contract applies to volunteers in the same way as it does to employees, without considering the implication of varied motivations and the lack of tangible reward in any depth. This emphasises the need for research to be appropriately targeted in order that it is useful to the voluntary sector.

The preceding discussion is not to suggest that none of the research carried out in the employment sector is relevant to volunteers: discussion so far in this thesis demonstrates that the epistemology of work on the psychological contract is varied and lacks consistency. In this sense, some work has more relevance to volunteers than other work and – with adaptation – most work published has something to say to the study of volunteers and their psychological contract. Although there are many significant caveats which need to be made, clearly the psychological contracts of volunteers and employees share the same heritage, it is the environment and social factors around them which differ. The study of the two areas, therefore, will provide additional clarity for the concept.

### 3.4 Conclusions on the psychological contract literature

Stretching back over more than half a century, the psychological contract has a long history in organisational research. As has been shown in this chapter, the concept has wide acceptance as a valid model for understanding something about workers but the various approaches to understanding and applying it have lacked a consistent and coherent focus. The existence of two distinct approaches, characterised in this document as 'early' and 'contemporary' discourses, or elsewhere as 'pre-' and 'post-Rousseau' (Nichols, 2013), demonstrate the dangers of research studies occurring in isolation from each other, leading to tension in understandings of concepts identified by common terms. In fact, it may be argued that these two discourses are separate things, and that work conducted latterly, which seeks to combine both into one coherent whole (for example O'Donohue & Nelson, 2009) actually confuses the issue further rather than shedding light on a complex subject. Few studies in the field have acknowledged the competing discourses, many preferring to deny them and stay within the confines of the approach they prefer. This is to the detriment of the concept as a whole. Some established fields of study within organisational behaviour have managed to exist with competing versions of theory, moving forward with enriched understanding rather than trying to merge everything into one sanitised version. It may be that this is the way psychological contract theory has to move in order to gain the robustness and validation needed to address the weaknesses currently apparent. For this to happen, however, will require scholars to address the many facets of psychological contract without needing to fit them all into one neat solution.

The majority of work on the psychological contract to date has been conducted in a quantitative manner, reducing the multi-faceted issues into easily managed correlations and regressions. Whilst there is obviously a place for such analysis, the dominance of quantitative research in a context which is, in general, implicitly understood and existing at

a sub-conscious level is challenged here. It is interesting that qualitative approaches have seen a resurgence of interest recently, especially in studies involving volunteers, who typically invite a more personal approach than the large samples of 'subjects' used in early contemporary work. The body of knowledge of psychological contract is broad, with studies on many different aspects of the concept – although breach and violation have received a disproportionate amount of interest – but in other areas there is a distinct lack of depth of research. This needs to be addressed before the field can move forward much more with integrity. For instance, the formation of the psychological contract has still not been clearly mapped: as Conway and Briner (2009:91) suggest, there exists a lack of understanding about how employees 'make sense' of their psychological contracts. In spite of the emphasis on breach and violation, as well as a body of work on content *per se*, the process of contract formation, structural signals and external factors' impact on the contract and the possibility of changes to the contract with time, role or seniority have not been adequately addressed to provide an in-depth understanding of the concept.

Introducing the study of volunteers to psychological contract theory has highlighted the tensions in existing work very clearly. For volunteers, many of the boundaries experienced by employees do not apply and therefore volunteers, as Pearce (1993:128) noted, they are freer to challenge and re-define the roles they perform within organisations. Furthermore, the lack of monetary motivation often draws into stark relief the factors contributing to the psychological contract for volunteers – making it easier to identify salient issues than it might be in a sample of employees. However, this body of work has not yet taken the opportunity to challenge the weaknesses identified above, and instead – in many cases – it compounds the lack of clarity by failing to address the problems.

In 2004, Guest presented his agenda for future research on the psychological contract, covering the need for a greater understanding of the context in which the contract is formed,

how the state of the contract might be understood and how issues of fairness and trust might be better included in models of the contract. Nichols added more to the list in his 2013 paper, presenting evidence for a socially constructed model of the contract, he argued that qualitative research may be better placed to deepen our understanding of the issues, especially in volunteers.

### 3.5 The role of organisational culture

Developed as a way of understanding behaviour within organisations, the study of organisational culture has been popularised since the 1980s. It is popularly understood as a concept – although, as with the psychological contract, there are many definitions. It forms part of the horizon in many organisations, governing the behaviours, actions and expectations of members of the group. For voluntary organisations, as noted by Pearce (1993), the culture of the organisation is often an even stronger influence on volunteers than it is on employees, given the lack of tangible reward – and therefore control – in volunteers. It is, therefore, important to consider culture in a discussion of volunteer behaviour.

Schein (1985) describes organisational culture at three levels: Artefacts – the visible structures and processes of the organisation. These might include dress code, the type of language used or social behaviour as evidenced by ‘rituals’ and ceremonies. The second level is Values – the behaviours and norms accepted within the organisation. These influence the way people behave and might involve moral or ethical standards or the selection of group members. They may not be the same for all group members: in some organisations shop-floor workers are expected to behave in different ways to managers, for instance. The third level is Basic Assumptions – the unspoken beliefs relating to human nature, relationships, reality and truth and humans’ relationship to nature. Basic Assumptions are normally not shared in the group but individual positions, resistant to change and well ingrained at a subconscious level. Where individuals have basic

assumptions which do not align with the artefacts and (especially) values of the organisation, conflict and tension is likely to ensue. Values and Basic Assumptions form the 'invisible processes' of culture without which the visible structures could not exist.

More than the three levels identified by Schein (1985) however, culture is also understood as being formed by the group in a socially constructed manner. Thus, Alvesson (2002:3-4) suggests,

*"For me values are less central and less useful than meanings and symbolism in cultural analysis ... Culture is not primarily 'inside' people's heads, but somewhere 'between' the heads of a group of people where symbols and meanings are publicly expressed, for example in work group interactions, in board meetings but also in material objects. Culture then is central in governing the understanding of behaviour, social events, institutions and processes. Culture is the setting in which these phenomena become comprehensible and meaningful."*

'Who is the deal with?' is a question set up in studies of the psychological contract (see section 3.1.4, above and 6.1, below). Within RDA, it will be seen that 'the deal' is heavily influenced by the enduring values, beliefs and practices which shape the culture of the organisation, enabling this case study to shed some light on the answer in this organisation. Drawing on the work of Alvesson, it is possible to define the organisational culture in such a social and integrated organisation as RDA as indeed being an explanatory factor for understanding the way volunteers behave. In this way, culture is part of the considerations made when exploring both the Serious Leisure framework and the psychological contract of volunteers. Within this study, culture is acknowledged as being an important formative influence on volunteers; however, it has formed a backdrop to the framework of Serious Leisure and the concept of psychological contract rather than being an axis of work of its own.

### 3.6 Research Questions

Drawing on the literature presented and discussed in this chapter and the previous one, it is now possible to set out the research questions addressed in this thesis. Using serious leisure as a framework to understand a range of volunteers in an organisation which engages many volunteers to deliver their services, this study seeks to test the theory of serious leisure using the psychological contract framework. In so doing, it provides more evidence to understand both theoretical approaches in a context which – as has been demonstrated above – requires further research.

Therefore, the study addresses the following questions:

- Does the Serious Leisure framework adequately explain the commitment and behaviour of volunteers in RDA?
- If yes to question 1, does the existence of Serious Leisure influence the formation and structure of volunteers' psychological contracts?
- What (if anything) can be learned from the interaction of Serious Leisure and psychological contract theory for the management of volunteers?

Each of these questions addresses discrete aspects of the existing literature of volunteers and psychological contracts. Using them as a framework for this study draws out the uniqueness of the context of the study but addresses the common themes faced by voluntary organisations across many fields.



## 4 – Method

Having reviewed the literature relevant to this study in the Chapters Two and Three, this chapter discusses the methods used to conduct the study. It explains why the research was approached in the way it was, the factors influencing design and the role of the researcher in the study. Considering how other work in similar fields approached similar challenges, the methods used are extensively discussed. The chapter concludes by considering issues of validity, reliability, ethics and the limitations of the study.

### 4.1 Methodology

Working within one organisation, this study takes a subjective approach, accepting that the world we understand is created partially by our own position within it. That position is informed by our experiences, the way we interact with others and the things we learn on our way through life. The former accepts that there is an ‘external reality’ which exists independent of actors in that reality and that this reality has both superficial and deep structures which may, or may not, be directly observable. It also suggests that an individual’s understanding of their reality is constrained by their background and education. This combination of structures and individuals creates a situation where individuals may have an effect on their environment, but they are not solely responsible for it – there are other variables, a position which makes allowance for culture, history and organisational practices and norms. From this position, it is possible to use the epistemology of a post-positivist socially constructed approach. Emphasising the meaning and creation of knowledge, post-positivism allows theory and practice to be combined in one research approach (Ryan, 2006) and creates space for the researcher’s motivations and understandings. In a setting such as RDA, this is an appropriate way to consider the complex motivations and relationships which exist. Richie and Rigano (2001:752) suggest that, *“in post-positivist research, truth is*

*constructed through a dialogue; valid knowledge claims emerge as conflicting interpretations ... and are negotiated ... we talk about the issues raised during the interviews, the participants reactions, and our interpretations of these interwoven ideas."*

Qualitative data, in the form of interview transcripts coupled with secondary material from the case study organisation, was analysed using Altheide's (1996) Ethnographic Content Analysis (ECA). Drawing on the methodology of ethnography for inspiration, but distinct from it and used only as a way of analysing the content of documents, ECA is a reflexive approach to content analysis. It uses categories of analysis in the first instance but then allows and expects other categories to emerge from the study. In this way, the data within this study was initially coded to categories found within the literature on Serious Leisure and the psychological contract. As analysis developed, other categories emerged and were included in the analysis. The origin of each category is indicated in table 4.4 below.

The remainder of this chapter explores the implications of a subjective, critical approach to ontological and epistemological assumptions in this research, presenting and clarifying the effect of these implications on the research methods used in this project.

Issues of theoretical adequacy are explored including an explanation of how the ontological and epistemological perspectives adopted, that of critical realism and social constructionism respectively, serve to inform the conceptualisation of the psychological contract in serious leisure volunteers. The chapter also discusses the ethical considerations taken by the researcher as well as issues of validity and reliability as they apply to various aspects of the study. Table 4.1 provides an overview of the methodological issues important in this chapter and of the choices that have guided the research.

Table 4.1 Methodological Issues

Issues	Research Choices
Ontology	Subjective
Epistemology	<div style="text-align: center;">↓</div> Post-positivist Social Constructionism
Theoretical Perspective	Psychological Contract Serious Leisure <div style="text-align: center;">↓</div>
Methods	<div style="text-align: center;">↓</div> Qualitative  Following principles of ethnography: including participant observation, semi-structured interviews,  Analytical approach: Ethnographic Content Analysis (ECA)
Validity	Are the concepts generated from the data and expressed codes:  (a) coherent and (b) consistent with the data and the way I categorise it
Reliability	Given the definition of codes, am I consistent in applying them? Would others using the same definitions arrive at the same set of data?

## 4.2 Choice of Method

### 4.2.1 Initial planning

The initial intention for this study was to duplicate the work of O'Donohue and Nelson's (2009) study, by adopting a mixed method approach combining both quantitative and qualitative items. This approach to research has been explained as a way to obtain 'elaboration, enhancement, illustration, clarification of the results from one method with

the results from the other method' (Green, Carcelli & Graham, 1989:258-259). As O'Donohue and Nelson discuss, the items their study used were adapted from 'published scholarly work' (Tekelab & Taylor, 2003; Tyler & Blader, 2005; Farmer & Fedor, 1999) and therefore they had been proven to be validated and reliable. The authors shared their study questions with the researcher of the present study following a personal communication. The rationale for trying to replicate the earlier study was to compare the results in different populations sharing characteristics such as longevity of volunteering and demographics. This would have yielded results explaining the general characteristics of the psychological contract in the population being investigated. However, whilst RDA has many thousands of volunteers, not all are known personally to National Office and, at the time of the study data collection, records of the majority of volunteers acting at Group level were not available. Therefore access to these Group volunteers would have been difficult to gain and is unlikely to have been reliable.

The value of the quantitative study is in its ability to generalise and predict over a wide range of responses. Quantitative methods are only valid when respondent numbers are sufficiently high to generate statistically significant results from a representative sample, which can then be analysed to predict patterns of behaviour of the factor in question. Mixed method studies provide for the use of qualitative responses which are 'integrated' (Creswell et al., 2003:212) to give depth to the data generated in a quantitative survey. This moderates the need for huge numbers of data points, as would be found in a positivist scientific study, for instance, but it does not negate the need for large enough samples to give validity to the quantitative data.

The sample sizes found in existing quantitative studies investigating the psychological contract would be considered very small in terms of hard science. Though they are conducted within a social sciences framework, which might make the size of sample more

acceptable in relative terms, it does not render the analysis of very few data points any more reliable. O'Donohue and Nelson (2009) generated 261 usable responses to their survey. This is relatively high in the field of psychological contract research: Herriot, Manning and Kidd (1997) used sample groups of employees (n=184) and managers (n=184), Krivokapic-Skoko and O'Neill (2008) (mixed method) n=117, Robinson and Morrison (2000) n=147. Sels, Janssens and van den Brande (2004) is the exception to this trend with n=1106.

Considering the population size when population is delineated as RDA National Office volunteers gave a total of 82. It was anticipated, based on historical response rates to communication – both directly to National Office and to the researcher – that up to 90% of participants would respond to a request for information. However, that number was considered to be inadequate in order to generate a statistically significant result using a mixed method study approach. The use of a quantitative approach would have suggested that the researcher expected generalisability from the results, but this was not the case. Therefore an alternative approach was formed.

#### 4.2.2 Deciding on a purely qualitative approach

To address the problem of small population size and the challenges of reliability in statistical analysis, it was decided to take a purely qualitative approach to the study. Qualitative methods have become more prevalent in psychological contract research since the early 2000s, signalling an increasing acceptance of the need to explore aspects of people's experience in depth rather than in breadth. Significantly, many quantitative studies of the psychological contract have also conducted an element of qualitative work as validation and to corroborate and expand on their statistical findings, enriching the depth of their findings. However, as discussed in Chapters Two and Three, all published work on serious leisure has been qualitative to date. Many, though not all, studies of the psychological contract in volunteers have been conducted qualitatively (Taylor et al., 2006; Starnes, 2007; Vantilborgh

et al., 2011). There is little debate or justification for the choice of methods either way. For the researcher working in the gap between these fields, therefore, there arise some methodological challenges and questions.

For this study, the choice of a qualitative approach was made for three main reasons:

- The desire to respect the softer, pre-Rousseau views of the psychological contract
- As discussed above, a qualitative approach would allow an exploration of the views of participants which reflects their understanding of their world and allows the researcher to share in the creation of that understanding.
- The practical issue of access to participants.

Firstly, the decision was informed by a desire to encompass the early thoughts of Argyris and Levinson et al. on the nature of the psychological contract: an implicit understanding, formed without awareness of its existence by group dynamics and culture, as well as individual preconditions and organisational input. A 'talking' exploration seems more appropriate to such a concept, allowing ideas to emerge through a semi-structured framework rather than forcing respondents to think in someone else's terms about their understanding of a situation. This approach provides space within the research context for participants to explore their responses to questions in an unhurried and non-threatening environment. Furthermore, it creates the opportunity for the researcher to check whether similar words, used by different respondents, have the same meaning. Clearly, this is a critical issue when examining such a nebulous concept as the psychological contract.

However, there are also challenges with this approach. Recognising that the psychological contract is made up of unverballed thoughts and tacit understandings (expectations) which will be verbalised (thought about and discussed) through a process of explicit examination by research – in this case, interview or focus group, there is a strong possibility that verbalising these expectations will alter them and possibly, by bringing them to the forefront

of consciousness, alter the individuals' relationship with the organisation. The question may then arise: What does this do to expectations? Does it conflate them ("because I've thought about it, I want more from the organisation") or deflate ("actually, I'm not sure I've been reasonable in expecting that, now I think about it") and therefore create a higher risk of breach or violation – or conversely, would it align the expectations of the two parties (thus becoming more 'promissory' in Rousseau's terms)? This area has not been addressed in publications to date and may be a fruitful area for future research.

Given the concerns discussed above regarding the alteration of psychological contracts by their verbalisation, conducting this research by asking people what they think their psychological contract is (or some, more sophisticated version of the question), was problematic to the researcher. Initial thoughts around methods included the use of focus groups or interviews to explore – in depth – the constituent parts of the psychological contract, but it is notable that few key studies in the field use qualitative data, preferring to rely instead on quantitative, survey-type approaches (Robinson & Morrison, 1995; Robinson, Kraatz & Rousseau, 1994; De Cuyper et al., 2008; Lester, Kickul & Bergmann, 2007; Wang, 2003). This may be due to the preference for quantitative work from a positivist perspective by journal editors, or to the perceived higher generalisability of quantitative methods. Furthermore, the use of interview or focus-group techniques necessarily requires the potentially problematic 'verbalisation' of the psychological contract and therefore it was proposed that information should be sought from respondents based on assessing their understanding of their *expectations* of the organisation and volunteering role, rather than verbalising the term 'psychological contract'.

The second, more practical ground for the choice of a qualitative method was the issue of access to participants. It was considered that a total population for the study of 82 was much

more appropriate for selective qualitative research, therefore this was the route decided upon.

#### 4.2.3 The role of social construction in shaping the research approach

Accepting that each participant shapes their own experience of reality as well as having some 'external' realities is a central tenet of social constructionism, and allows participants to express their understanding of their situation without the need for superimposed boundaries from the researcher.

Particularly in an organisation with a strong and stable culture, such as RDA, participants will have a view of reality which is in part constructed in conjunction with other people in their social world. This clearly informs their understanding of how they operate and the factors that shape their environment – far more so when considering an intangible such as the psychological contract than when discussing physical aspects of their environment such as horses or stabling. Silverman (2013) suggests keeping data collection simple and allowing more depth for qualitative studies. He also recommends the use of pre-existing data, where it is reliable and relevant. No pre-existing data in the form of interviews existed, but there is plenty of organisational material: the website, books of organisational history, records and census forms have been available and used to provide detail and information which both supports the study and provides context for the study. This organisational material also provides background knowledge and a sense of history for volunteers who participated in the study, informing their construction of the social world they inhabit. The use of supporting information as identified above, the majority published by RDA itself, provides a rounded – although not triangulated – picture of the issues being investigated when combined with the data generated by semi-structured interviews and the researcher's understanding of the organisation, gained through having insider status. This will be discussed in the next section.



### 4.3 Conversant observer status

My role in this study could be defined as that of a 'conversant observer' (Nichol, 2011), because of my pre-existing involvement with, knowledge of and social relationships within the case study organisation. This status developed from the more generally accepted 'participant observation' method of data collection. Spradley (1980) questioned the ability of participant observers to really understand the situation being researched, although several writers (Jorgensen, 1989; Kirk, 1986) suggest that observation can enhance 'theoretical sensitivity' – although this also depends on the researchers understanding of multiple sources of information around the topic and the situation being researched. Nichol (2011) developed this idea to position herself as an insider – not just observing, but actively understanding and relating to the object of study, whilst not claiming to be part 'of' the researched situation specifically: she was married to someone in the specific role she was researching but was not herself a role-holder, although she was a member of the institution of interest. This mirrors my role in RDA very well.

The involvement of the researcher in the organisation sits very well within a qualitative approach to research, recognising the role of the researcher in a socially constructed environment (Edwards & Skinner, 2009:262). For certain, a previous affiliation with the case study organisation may encourage the researcher to perceive elements of the data in ways which fit her 'world view'; this is a possibility in any research situation and is overcome by sensitive – and sensible – research design. Being known to the organisation was a significant benefit when trying to achieve access to potential research participants. RDA is very open to research; since 2011 it has employed a member of staff to co-ordinate research applications – most commonly from undergraduate students on 'vocational' equine-related courses. These applications are passed in front of a small committee (of which I was part) for consideration and approval before access is granted or denied to the researcher. This

approval, however, does not necessarily mean that individuals will be willing to work with the researching party. In a few cases, volunteers are nervous of the time, effort or information required and occasionally refuse to co-operate. In my case, this process was not applied. Based on my long-term relationships with RDA National Office, I was invited to discuss my project at a very early stage – two years before data collection was undertaken – with all the Regional Chairmen, the majority of the Board of Trustees and the Chief Executive. There was extensive discussion at this meeting of the kind of issues that would likely be faced and raised some concerns, chiefly around interviewees’ anonymity. These were debated and addressed. The overwhelming tone of this meeting however, was enthusiasm for the work and the findings it might create in order to ‘help understand’ volunteers and manage them better. The Regional Chairmen are effectively the ‘gatekeepers’ for ‘National’ volunteers: therefore to have them in agreement at this early stage was very helpful indeed. I would like to think that their agreement was based purely on the strength of the presentation I gave and the persuasive argument I made in favour of the work; in reality, whilst I am certain that had an effect, I also suspect that being a person known to the majority of these gatekeepers through my earlier and contemporaneous work at National Office was a factor – they knew me and trusted me to be ‘one of them’. Being ‘sponsored’ by the Chief Executive was additionally clearly a positive factor in their predisposition to agree to giving me access. Being an ‘insider’ was very useful during the interviews themselves too. As will be shown later in the thesis, a number of interviewees were visibly reassured by my understanding of their ‘world’ and this shared experience liberated them to talk more freely, thus enhancing the honesty of the interviews.

The ‘lack’ of independent status in this work is therefore not considered to be a limitation to its value. Indeed, the complexity of RDA’s structures and the density of cultural artefacts at all levels of the organisation probably require some degree of prior understanding in order to best interpret what is happening. It would be physically possible to conduct this study

without prior involvement in RDA, but I suspect the openness of interviewees – and consequently the depth of data achieved – would be much less than the present study actually achieved.

#### 4.4 Method – an inductive, qualitative approach

As discussed in Chapter Three, extant literature on the psychological contract is predominantly quantitative in approach, with only a few recent papers taking a qualitative or mixed method approach to research; the majority of these papers being in the area of volunteer studies, which is of course the area of interest to this study. Chapter Two, however, demonstrated that studies of serious leisure are entirely qualitative in approach. The contrasts between these two approaches challenges attempts to integrate them in one study and yet, as Kennelly (2013) suggests, a qualitative, interpretive method is more sensitive to contextual factors influencing participation and the experiences participants gain from their serious leisure activities. For this reason, as discussed earlier in this chapter, a qualitative approach was chosen for this study, to allow sensitive exploration of the psychological contract through understanding the lived experiences of the volunteers who participated in the study.

Taking a qualitative, instrumental case study approach, this research follows the precedents set by previous studies. The *instrumental* case study (Silverman, 2013: 143) refers to a case which ‘is examined mainly to provide insight into an issue or to revise a generalisation. Although the case is studied in depth, the main focus is on something else.’ In this case, the focus is on the development of theory of the psychological contract in the serious leisure volunteer rather than the organisation itself, and the organisation provides unusual access to such committed and passionate individuals. It begins from a position of partial understanding of the situation and asks no more than ‘what is going on here?’ (Silverman, 2013: 103). The use of qualitative methods allows in-depth analysis of small numbers of

subjects, from which it is possible to draw 'generalisations to theoretical propositions, not to populations' (Yin, 2009:15). So, rather than trying to *prove* or *disprove* a hypothesis, as a quantitative study might do, the qualitative approach within a case study looks to see how well the data generated tests the existing theory in the area of study. Easton (2010) suggests that "case research allows the researcher the opportunity to tease out and disentangle a complex set of factors and relationships ... this is a process of iterative-parallel research which "...implies a continuous moving back and forth between the diverse stages of the research project" (Verschuren, 2003)". The inductive nature of the study will be discussed further in section 4.4.4.

#### 4.4.1 Deciding on the approach for this study

Early plans for this work, as outlined in 4.2.2, were for a mixed method study replicating O'Donohue and Nelson (2009) which tested the outcomes of published work in a different population which shared characteristics with the original population sample. However, a combination of methodological preference and population size suggested that this was not an appropriate course of action. The focus therefore moved to finding a more suitable approach. Much of the work published in the fields of serious leisure is interview-based. Considering the type of respondent this study would be approaching, an interview was considered to be a credible way of getting ample good quality information to address the research questions.

Using the themes in O'Donohue and Nelson's (2009) work a schedule of questions was drawn up. The themes were used to retain similarity to existing, validated work. The schedule of questions also used themes found in Raja, Johns and Ntalianis (2004), Rousseau (2000) and Herriot, Manning & Kidd (1997). The latter papers were used because they also addressed issues of relevance to the study at hand. The questions sought to begin from a broad base of trust-creation and funnel down to areas of research interest, whilst allowing

sufficient scope for the conversation to cover topics of importance to respondents. They included phrasing to encourage consideration of 'critical incidents' as found in some work on the psychological contract – although, as shall be discussed below, these questions were amended after the first few interviews to elicit more effective responses. The schedule of questions is included as Appendix A in this thesis.

Ethics clearance was gained from the University of Sheffield Ethics Review Committee on 28<sup>th</sup> June 2012.

#### 4.4.2 Approaching participants

As discussed in section 4.3, I was invited to speak to RDA Regional Chairmen in the early stages of this study. The purpose of that meeting was to inform and gain support from the group, who at that stage were seen as 'gatekeepers' for the wider population of volunteers. During the meeting, however, they expressed keen interest in being involved themselves and many specifically asked if they could be interviewed for the study – this was very useful as the research design changed over time and made accessing the Regional Chairmen for interview very easy indeed.

Using the phraseology of Silverman (2013:103), this project sought to understand 'what is going on in the psychological contract of serious leisure volunteers' by eliciting the understandings of volunteers across the 'timeline of involvement': all the way from new volunteers to those who had been involved for close to 40 years. Work conducted in 2009 (Brooke-Holmes, unpublished report for RDA) identified that County Chairs had a spread of time in the organisation from 4 to more than 30 years; furthermore, the County Chair role is well defined by National Office and the role descriptor is generally accepted. This, therefore, was considered to be a good starting point for research. At the time data collection was undertaken for this project (July 2012), there were 63 County Chairs in post. To extend the length of service of volunteers further, the sample was extended to Regional Chairs, who

had between 4 and 40+ years involvement in RDA. Nineteen Regional Chairs were in post at this same date. These two roles – clearly defined and with differences in scope but broadly similar demands – therefore covered the long-term volunteers, and gave a total population of 82 volunteers. In order to access the views of volunteers in a different role, volunteer co-ordinators were also invited to participate. At the time, 85 volunteer co-ordinators were known to National Office. Little information was held about the volunteer co-ordinators, except the names of some. Once they had been contacted by the researcher, however, it transpired that their tenure and experience would closely mirror that of the County and Regional Chairs and therefore it was decided that – with a few exceptions – pursuing volunteer co-ordinators as a discrete group was not likely to be a valuable approach. Access to new volunteers was sought and granted by a large purpose-built centre in the south of England. The centre was approached because the Group Organiser was particularly interested in the outcomes of this project and they had a wide range of new volunteers, from Duke of Edinburgh candidates to retired people, that they were confident would ‘help’ the researcher.

Once I had reached the stage of being prepared to conduct the data collection stage, I again contacted the target population which was identified as volunteers who were established in RDA (no minimum time was set, although it was anticipated that time would be counted in years rather than weeks), held a defined ‘administrative’ role (i.e. Chair or Co-ordinator) and were available for interview during the National Championships. The whole population was contacted with an invitation to be part of the study. The first invitation was sent by email where an email address was available or by post where it was not, and was followed up with a second contact a couple of weeks later if a response had not been received. Twenty six people responded positively to the invitation, with length of service from four to fifty-five years. Eighteen of these held either Regional or County Chair roles whilst eight held the role of Volunteer Co-ordinator. All planned to be at the National Championships that year.

It was decided to conduct the majority of interviews over the weekend of the RDA National Championships. This annual event takes place at a large agricultural college with extensive provision of equestrian facilities. The National Championships have a celebration type atmosphere and the majority of Regional and County Chairmen normally attend the weekend. In terms of access to participants, therefore, it was an ideal location, being central and convenient for both participants and researcher. A suitable room was identified in the main building, close to the most commonly visited rooms but sufficiently out of the way to be fairly quiet and this was set up with table, chairs and recording equipment. A poster explaining the purpose of the research was displayed prominently in the main building to inform all visitors and volunteers of the study. Signage was placed around the building so participants knew where to go for interview.

During the weekend of the Championships, a number of volunteers approached me to ask about the study and show their interest and support. These conversations led to several invitations to visit Groups to 'talk to' newer volunteers as a comparison group to the established volunteers. I therefore visited a large RDA Group the week after the National Championships during a planned 'work day'. All volunteers had been invited to come and help tidy, maintain, repair or clean parts of the centre in preparation for the next years' riding. There were, therefore, lots of volunteers present. I was introduced to all of them as 'Georgina, who is a National volunteer and also doing her own research into us volunteers in RDA'. I was given a warm welcome, shown a small room which I was to use as my base for interviews, and told to catch people as I could to speak to them. Previous background research had indicated two volunteers in the Group whose profiles would complement those already interviewed so they were my first 'catches'. Thereafter, I 'caught' five volunteers who were fairly new to the group, as can be seen in Table 4.2.

From a potential population across the three formal roles of 167 (87 in Regional and County roles, the rest in Co-ordinator roles, most of whom were ruled out at an early stage as discussed above), 18 were interviewed. From a rolling population of Group volunteers of approximately 25, 7 were interviewed.

A frequently made criticism of qualitative methods is the nature of selection of participants. For many studies, a form of purposive sampling is employed, allowing data to be gathered from subjects who are already involved with the topic of interest rather than demonstrating an impartial, 'scientific' approach to selection and sampling. Purposive sampling may also be known as 'judgement sampling' (Edwards & Skinner, 2009:67) because the researcher uses his/her judgement to select appropriate respondents. They further suggest that the technique has validity through selecting study settings and participants based on their features and characteristics to enable the researcher to 'gather in-depth information on areas of research interest' and that it has "definite applicability to the sport management context". In this case, the sample was selected to give a wide range of volunteers in terms of length of service and role, whilst retaining manageability of the data generated through controlling the number of roles performed. This has the function of allowing some consistency of participants' volunteering experiences which provides a common base for effective analysis. Edwards & Skinner also write that snowballing the sample – where further referrals are made by the first group of participants – allows the researcher to better investigate 'aspects of organisations or people that are interconnected in some way ... they may have a link – either director or indirect' (2009:67-68). This differs from a convenience sample, in which members of the study population are randomly selected based on their availability. A convenience sample in this study would have been any volunteer at the National Championships, whereas the selection of volunteers holding specific formal roles created a set of criteria suggesting certain characteristics would be shared – for example, a commitment to hold a formal role suggests that these volunteers are serious about their



involvement in RDA, thus fulfilling one criteria for this research and allowing the focus to be on the psychological contract rather than having to filter for seriousness during the interview. Purposive sampling was employed for this study.

#### 4.4.3 Conducting the Interviews

<b>Identifier</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Length of Service</b> (years unless otherwise shown)	<b>Length of Interview</b> (mins:secs)
GX	Group Volunteer	4 weeks	9:49
SI	Group Volunteer	12 weeks	12:30
MD	Group Volunteer	20 weeks	16:58
XU	Group Volunteer	26 weeks	13:44
KR	Group Trustee	3	18:41
CD	Volunteer Co-ordinator	4	30:15
TC	Group Volunteer	4	9:19
TN	Volunteer Co-ordinator	4	61:26
IC	Group Volunteer	6	47:32
KO	Volunteer Co-ordinator	6	32:49
MN	Group Volunteer	10	47:16
TD	County Chair	14	58:06
DD	Group Organiser	20	22:07
DC	Regional Chair	22	39:34
KQ	Regional Chair	24	48:34
DT	Regional Chair	25	39:52
MC	Regional Chair	25	47:27
KK	Regional Chair	28	25:15
EX	Volunteer Co-ordinator	32	26:00
KT	Regional Chair	32	26:53

EK	Regional Chair	33	27:33
GT	County Chair	33	25:23
IH	County Chair	34	35:37
TT	Regional Chair	36	38:39
FE	County Chair	39	23:00
Table 4.2 Table of interviews ordered by time in RDA with length of interview and role			

Interviews took place in the nominated space, which was set up appropriately for the purpose. Participants were relaxed in the environment, it being a familiar space to them in both the National Championships and Group setting and all agreed to the terms included in the consent form regarding anonymity of data and the use of voice recording equipment. I took a colleague with me on both occasions to support the use of the recording equipment and to reflect on each interview as we progressed through some fairly intensive days. The validation process of taking a few minutes between each interview allowed some clear space for reflection on which aspects of the interview worked well and which did not, thus refining the interview process as the days progressed.

In particular, the references to critical incidents did not work well in the first few interviews, so I changed the way I approached those questions, eventually removing all reference to 'particular times when ...'. Although critical incident analysis has been used in psychological contract research (Herriot & Manning, 1997, Atkinson, 2007), it has been recognised that the technique works best when events happened fairly recently; many of the participants in this study had a number of years' memories to draw on and therefore identifying particular moments was not easy, neither did it appear to be particularly accurate. It became clear that the same information was forthcoming through the use of the other planned questions and the development of the conversation organically.

Interviews were designed to be semi-structured and all remained as such. Participants were very happy to talk about their experiences of RDA, their understandings and expectations of

their role, themselves and others, but they were also happy to allow me to lead the discussion and steer it where I needed it to go. There were no instances of conversation 'drying up', but several where I had to gently bring it back on course. Due to my status as an 'insider', many participants expressed considerable security in my assurances of anonymity and spoke very freely, both about other volunteers and about events which had caused them to experience strong emotional responses. Although it was not addressed in the ethical procedures of the University, I was very aware of the duty I held to respond appropriately to such responses, to retain confidentiality and to provide reassurance and some form of support throughout.

#### 4.4.4 Transcription and analysis of data generated from interviews into themes using nVivo

All interviews were recorded, the files securely stored under password and transcribed shortly afterwards. Names were anonymised. The first three interviews were transcribed by the author of the study, the rest professionally transcribed before being reviewed and confirmed by the author. Interview transcripts were uploaded to the qualitative data analysis software package nVivo. The use of nVivo10 facilitated the management and analysis of the large quantities of data generated during the interviews and allowed comprehensive and efficient searching of the transcripts for these purposes.

Following upload, interviews were analysed for themes and content, especially using the context of the discussions following Altheide's Ethnographic Content Analysis. Altheide (1987) suggests that this method allows the researcher to "*search for contexts, underlying meanings, patterns, and processes, rather than mere quantity or numerical relationships between two or more variables*", using emergent themes and following an inductive and reflective approach to the data. Although Altheide uses this method of data analysis primarily as a framework for the analysis of contemporary events in world affairs, Edwards

and Skinner (2009) suggest that it has much relevance to research in complex contextual situations such as in this research. They further suggest that sport management research, in particular, is an appropriate area for the use of critical and socially constructed accounts of problems through ethnography. Recognising that the use of qualitative data in a constructionist epistemology is a very big step away from the more common, positivist and quantitative approach to psychological contract research, it was considered that ECA offered a robust analysis method which works with the differences between quantitative and qualitative analysis to demonstrate the richness and specificity of data generated by an investigation such as the one documented in this thesis. Altheide (1987) offers a table which compares the attributes of quantitative (QCA) and ethnographic (ECA) content analysis which is reproduced below:

	<b>QCA</b>	<b>ECA</b>
Research Goal	Verification	Discovery; Verification
Reflexive Research Design	Seldom	Always
Emphasis	Reliability	Validity
Progression from Data Collection, Analysis, Interpretation	Serial	Reflexive; Circular
Primary Researcher Involvement	Data Analysis and Interpretation	All Phases
Sample	Random or Stratified	Purposive and Theoretical
Pre-structured Categories	All	Some
Training Required to Collect Data	Little	Substantial
Type of Data	Numbers	Numbers; Narrative
Data Entry Points	Once	Multiple
Narrative Description and Comments	Seldom	Always
Concepts Emerge During Research	Seldom	Always

Data Analysis	Statistical	Textual; Statistical
Data Presentation	Tables	Tables and Text
		Altheide 1987:67

TABLE 4.3 Comparison of QCA and ECA

For this study, a small number of nodes (themes) for data were identified from the literature. Transcripts were initially coded against these terms which were then refined and developed in a reflexive pattern to allow deeper analysis of the patterns and intricacies of the information gathered from interviews. The second column of Table 4.4 below shows the source of the nodes (categories of analysis), whether from extant literature (psychological contract ('PC') or Serious Leisure ('SL') literature) or reflexive development ('developed') during analysis in line with Altheide's explanations. The final, abridged nodes used for analysis of the data, together with overall frequency of appearance across all data and the lower level nodes used for detailed analysis are shown in Table 4.4 below.

Node number	Node (Source)	Frequency of appearance	Explanation	Sub-nodes
1	Attitude to Reward (PC)	21	How people feel or talk (emotional response) about reward	Smiles Improvement in riders Appreciation Physical objects (clothing) Awards/certificates Don't expect anything Families' expectations
2	Benefits of Volunteering (developed)	30	What people feel they get from volunteering	Nice people Friendship/ camaraderie Good experience (career/personal growth) Helping others Contact with horses Makes me feel better/gives me perspective Fun/enjoyment Giving back to society
3	Breach & Violation (PC)	34	Comments relating to breach or violation of PC	Utilising people's skills Valuing people Using people enough Being listened to

				Being heard Being thanked Communicating information Being treated as an individual Situation appropriate behaviour Politeness
4	Challenge of Paperwork (developed)	5	Talking about administration emails, forms, letters etc	Pressures Insurance Health and safety Quality Motivation Email
5	Challenge of People (developed)	25	Difficulties of dealing with volunteers, National Office or others	Combining necessary skills Controlling volunteers Managing volunteers Pressure of family (young/old) Personality clashes Politics Training the RDA way Emotional baggage 'Women and horses' Differing motivations
6	Influence of Employment (SL)	9	Where paid work has an acknowledged influence on responses	Reducing supply of volunteers Prioritising demands Women in the workplace Childcare Developing new skills
7	Ideological (PC)	42	Factors related with ideological commitment to organisation	Enjoyment Progress/learning Potential "Improving lives" Making a difference Achievement Loyalty Caring for others Treated as an individual Acceptance of difference Commitment Doing your best
8	Influence of Time (SL,PC)	11	Where people talk about how things have changed during their time with the organisation	Returning as adults Getting older Becoming habitual 'retiring' to the Group Losing effectiveness Dealing with change Commitment

				Learning
9	Motivation to Volunteer (developed)	63	Why people do what they do	Family history Making friends Peer pressure Fun Personal gain (non-financial) Using child's pony after child left home Child with disability Being close to horses Helping people/altruism External accreditation (D of E award/university/college) Providing structure to life
10	Parties to Psychological Contract (PC)	32	Where people talk about who is involved in their understanding of their volunteering - who PC is with	Group RDA the organisation National Office Regional committee Instructors Volunteers Riders Horses
11	Personal Development (SL)	21	The benefits gained by individuals through volunteering	Young people CV building Non-horsey Administration Horsey Going on courses/training Sitting by Nellie Guilt of getting personal benefit Volunteer career It's amazing what I've learned! Talking to others with difference Self-esteem
12	Professionalisation (developed)	16	Relating to increasing expectations on volunteers with regard to professional standards	Structures Losing the fun Muddling along Establishing correct ways of doing Health and Safety Standards Trustees responsibilities
13	Relational (PC)	42	Relating to aspects of the PC which have	Friendship Support Fun

			relational importance	Commitment Belonging Being appreciated People are nice Making a difference to lives Mutual respect
14	Support from RDA (developed)	28	Relating to help, support, training from National Office	Creation of handbook Valuing volunteers'/Groups' expertise/experience Insurance Understanding National's role Information flow All groups matter Training Someone to support with problems
15	Transactional (PC)	40	Relating to aspects of PC which have transactional importance	Training Organisation Time Commitment Loyalty Effort Nothing Fun/enjoyment Knowledge
16	Understanding of Role (developed)		Relating to people's view of what is included in their role and why	Communication Managing people Flexibility Succession Delegation Skills needed Commitment
17	Connection and Commitment (SL)	39	Relating to personal identity and willingness to forego other activities to continue with RDA	Prioritising RDA Challenges of time Valuing the Group time Sense of belonging Family pressures Getting 'sucked in' Planning for succession Committing to RDA Identity forming Passion Sense of fulfilment Role creep
18	Identity (SL)	20	Creating a separate sense of self through RDA	Demographics All consuming activity Providing structure Group



				Flexibility Like family Organisational culture
19	Serious Leisure (SL)	51	Instances of volunteers identifying seriousness in themselves or others	Expectation of seriousness (self/others) Other commitments Natural progression Commitment Benefits of volunteering Flexibility in roles Multiple roles 'Professional volunteers' Arm twisting Careers in RDA Succession planning
20	Casual Leisure (SL)	20	Instances of volunteers identifying casual leisure or non-serious activity in themselves or others	Responsibility Commitment Fear (disability/horses) Expectations Young people Understanding blocks involvement
21	Culture (developed)	30	Defining culture within the organisation	Horses People Flexibility Understanding the organisation Family Getting to know people Sense of achievement Fun Respect Support Acceptance Class
				Table 4.4 – nodes used in analysis of data

Altheide's ECA process allows for an iterative cycle of analysis and refinement to reflect emergent data – this cycle was extensively used to inform the findings of this study and the discussion which follows. ECA also encourages the use of multiple sources of information to cross-analyse, compare and clarify themes and findings. This is emphasised also by Jorgensen (1989) who suggests that the use of multiple sources of data aids understanding of a phenomenon or process. In this way, material published by RDA and material published

about RDA by third parties (volunteers, awarding bodies, the media) were all used to validate and substantiate the findings in relation to material emerging from the interviews.

#### 4.4.5 Issues of Validity and Reliability

The nature of a qualitative, inductive study, conducted by a researcher with prior knowledge of the organisation in which the research is carried out, is such that the work must demonstrate high levels of internal validity. It is not the intention of such a study that it is 'replicable' in the way a quantitative study might be, but rather that it achieves validity through the realistic setting, constant reflection and the use of supporting material to corroborate and test findings. This is achieved by a process of reflection and continuing data analysis allowed by the researcher's relationships with participants (Burns, 1997). The use of interviews allows participants' lived experiences and understandings of their worlds to be explored; providing it can be shown that participants 'have comparable explanations by conforming to categories and procedures in the study' (Burns, 1997, cited in Edwards & Skinner, 2009:272), this is considered to be evidence of reliability in the study. In this study, the consistency of responses from participants was striking and demonstrated the validity of the questions being asked as well as the topics being explored.

#### 4.4.6 Trust, Integrity and Ethical Considerations

In addition to the standard concerns raised by the University's ethical clearance process, the nature of topics being explored in these interviews highlighted the need for ethical and sensitive treatment of participants and the data generated by the interviews. As discussed in section 4.4.3, in a few interviews the conversation moved to difficult and emotional areas. The need for integrity and maintenance of trust at these times is paramount. My position as an 'insider' was key to achieving and maintaining trust and allowed deeper exploration of difficult topics such as perception of non-altruistic motivations than would have been possible without that status. These topics were dealt with through a sensitive approach to

questioning, drawing on knowledge of the organisation, and through a clearly communicated position of being willing to stop the interview at any point. Several participants requested the 'tape be turned off', stopping recording, even though they then continued to talk. Obviously, the content of this section of the conversation was not noted verbatim and could not form part of the data to be analysed, but the meta-themes of the conversation informed my observations and analysis, with participants' permission. Thus, in Jorgensen's (1989:70) words, 'accurate and dependable information' was acquired through the relationship between the researcher and participants.

#### 4.4.7 Methodological Limitations

An obvious limitation to this study is the selection of participants from a particular subset of role-holders. Had the study taken the views of more volunteers in Groups without formal roles, it may have produced a different set of conclusions. On the other hand, the selection of volunteers chosen for this study was deliberate for the characteristics they share to allow focussed analysis of the issues under analysis. In addition, the timing and situation of interviews at the National Championships ensured that the volunteers interviewed were self-selecting in their awareness of the 'wider' organisation and their general positivity to the organisation. They did not demonstrate unquestioning obedience or uncritical devotion to the organisation, however. In this regard, the natural setting of the research, recognising the impact of social factors and utilising the insider status of the researcher has mitigated these concerns to some extent. That the interviews took place in a relatively intense time frame may represent a limitation because it allowed only limited reflection on the outcomes of each interview. The consistency of data generated across all interviews nevertheless suggests that conducting them over a longer time frame is unlikely to have significantly changed the outcomes of the study.

## 4.5 Conclusions

Understanding the role of the psychological contract in serious leisure volunteers is an area where little research has been conducted to date. Taking a qualitative approach in keeping with previous studies of serious leisure, this study undertook a series of interviews with volunteers whose commitment might be classes as 'serious'. The data was collected and analysed using an ethnographic approach which was deemed to be the most appropriate given the setting and type of work being conducted. The approach to the research and method of analysis have been explained, together with consideration of issues of ethics, validity and limitations to the research.

The next chapters will move on to discuss and analyse the findings of this study. In particular, Chapter Five discusses the impact that serious leisure has on the RDA volunteer and how that plays out in the lived experience of the volunteer. Chapters Six and Seven explore the nature of the psychological contract of the participants in this study. Chapter Eight then considers the implications for the theory of the psychological contract and how these findings push forward our understanding of the serious leisure framework.

## 5 – Analysis of Serious Leisure with Regard to RDA Volunteers

### 5.1 Introduction

Chapter Two presented the Serious Leisure framework as developed by Stebbins (2007) and explored studies done within that framework to date. As discussed in that chapter, Stebbins developed six characteristics by which he identified serious participation in an activity. These characteristics have remained the yardstick by which all activities are measured in the field of serious leisure studies. The first part of this chapter presents evidence from this study by each characteristic and hence considers the claim that RDA volunteers are serious leisure volunteers. The chapter then goes on to discuss the implications for an organisation of having serious leisure volunteers and the stages involved as a person becomes serious about their volunteering. It analyses some significant factors influencing the resourcing of a volunteer-led organisation such as RDA. It concludes with a discussion of the findings and a summary of how these shape our understanding of serious leisure volunteering and contribute to understanding of the framework of Serious Leisure.

Much of the work on Serious Leisure has conceptualised volunteers as those who seek a leisure experience through their volunteering. As Orr (2006) suggests: *“In recent decades there have been researchers, from both leisure studies and voluntary studies, who have argued that volunteering is often a form of leisure. Parker has elaborated on the idea of ‘leisure volunteering’, where one’s primary motivation is ‘to have a leisure experience’, as a ‘kind of non-market leisure in which people are involved as participants rather than consumers ... in which people get together to produce a collective leisure experience’”*. However, the acquisition of a leisure experience is not the sole motivation for volunteers in RDA, and their activity is much more on the P-A-P scale discussed in Chapter 2 (Orr, 2006), in which they are committed to their Serious Leisure volunteering in terms which align them to the Professionals in the wider field of equine-assisted therapy. In therapy-related

voluntary activity, the motivation is normally altruistic and the expectation is of professional standards of behaviour and knowledge. Thus, these volunteers cross over into what might be termed pseudo-Professional status, where they act as Professionals but are proudly Amateur in the sense of not expecting to be rewarded for their work. The Public is the participants in the activity, parents, carers and other enablers of the participants. The next section considers the evidence for considering RDA volunteers as Serious Leisure participants and presents a discussion of the implications for the organisation.

## 5.2 Evidence of Serious Leisure status of the Volunteers in this study

### 5.2.1 First Characteristic: A need to persevere

Being an RDA volunteer is not always comfortable, nice or warm. Just as with studies of serious leisure participants in areas as diverse as amateur drama (Stebbins, 1997) and long distance running (Yair, 1990), there are challenges to be overcome which require determination and character. Working with horses presents mundane challenges such as bad weather, mud and grime, as well as the more complex demands imposed by dealing with adults and children with a range of disabilities. Many participants spoke positively of the benefits and joys of persevering: watching riders improve, and gaining understanding and friendship through their continuing involvement – but not all were entirely positive. In an otherwise glowing discussion, TN, speaking of the ongoing nature of her volunteering, simply said “*you plod on; week in, week out*”. There is no expression of glowing joy or constant fulfilment in the statement; it is an acknowledgement of the duty and commitment perceived as necessary to the act of volunteering. This was a common theme in the data gathered by this study; volunteers gained many benefits but openly accepted the costs of the tasks involved too – whether those are practical, social, financial or emotional. Gallant, Arai and Smale (2013) suggested the costs of serious leisure in stark terms, citing examples of people giving up their jobs and creating disharmony in their relationships, even to the

point of divorce. In this study, TT talked of the need to continue in the face of difficulties when she said,

*“it’s almost like a job, it’s like a role, when you take [it] on you can’t just walk away from it because you’ve got a sick child. You’ve got to try to work out how you can sort this out and continue with your volunteering role.”*

Another participant discussed a fellow volunteer, who, when asked to continue with a particular role, faced ‘her husband saying she had to resign [from the role] or divorce’ (FE). Stebbins (2007:11) suggests that ‘perseverance’ might normally take the form supporting a team during a losing season or managing embarrassment. For the participants in this study, perseverance is more tangible – although it is certainly not the case that all RDA volunteers face certain marital disharmony because of their volunteering. As Stebbins (2007) suggests, *“it is clear that positive feelings about the activity come, to some extent, from sticking with it through thick and thin, from conquering adversity.”* This characteristic will be revisited as the chapter progresses, as it is central to the experience of the volunteers interviewed.

### 5.2.2 Second Characteristic: The formation of a career

Following on from the need to persevere in the face of difficult environmental or emotional situations, volunteers within RDA who are serious and committed are encouraged to undertake continuous training and development – both at an initial stage of involvement and throughout their time with the organisation. Roles such as Instructor carry specific requirements for training and development, as will be discussed in Chapter Six, but other roles also offer the opportunity for career-type development, whether that is public speaking practice for Regional roles, fundraising training or safeguarding input. In the understanding of these volunteers, moving up to County, Regional and National roles clearly has ‘career ladder’ implications.

A volunteer does not need to seek promotion on the ladder of seniority for such opportunities to arise, however, and many volunteers who remain at Group level will also

achieve such a 'career' within their volunteering as they gain knowledge and understanding which they are able to pass on to others. As IC (clearly a serious leisure volunteer, but 'only' at Group level) said:

*"I wouldn't want to go any further because I can see other parts of my life [need to be in balance], I don't want any more, and I will do everything that I can in the Group to help take some work load and so on but I would not want to go up any higher"*

TT described her roles with RDA, clearly demonstrating the concept of a career:

*"I started off just as an Instructor and then I became Senior Instructor within the Group and then I was Group Chairman and then I became County Instructor and that became Regional Instructor and then when the Regional Chairman retired early through ill health I was acting Regional Chairman as well, so I did that for a while and then everyone said "Well you're doing it anyway why don't you take it on" and I've been saying 'no, no Regional Instructor is enough' so now I'm Regional Chairman as well as Regional Instructor, but I'm not a County Instructor anymore, I managed to find somebody to replace me there but it took a few years"*

The experience of TT is atypical of most volunteers, impressive as the story of her climb is; however, the concept of moving 'up the ladder' or taking on more roles at a similar level is familiar to all participants in this study, thereby giving credibility to the concept of a career within their volunteering. For example, DD – who had been involved with the organisation for some considerable period of time charted her progress through RDA thus:

*"I was just a regular helper on a Wednesday for about four or five years perhaps and then I went onto the fundraising committee and then I became fundraiser for 9 years – and I was a trustee at that stage as well because our trustee committee is made up very much of our volunteers who hold particular posts in the organisation ... And I became Chairman seven years ago"*

Interestingly though, many participants in this study disliked and objected to the term 'career', preferring to see a 'route' for development. Although they refer to their RDA activity as 'work', they do not associate it with the structure and impositions one might accept with a salaried role. Baldwin and Norris (1999) demonstrated that participants in their study strongly identified with the act of volunteering and believed that the endeavour represented 'who they are', thereby helping to define their self-image. In the same way, participants in this study could identify their volunteering as an important part of their life and something which offered them opportunities for self-development and skill



development. In this way they could relate to their volunteering for RDA as being similar to a job. For those volunteers who are no longer working, these opportunities clearly provide a sense of fulfilment and self-actualisation that might otherwise come from a salaried position. MC talked about how her own personal growth has been facilitated by other people's response to the work she does through her volunteering:

*"...if I'm truthful, I'm very unconfident, so I just think I can't do it ... it always amazes me when I can and I think that's helped me hugely as well because ... I do ok and that's good, it's helped me too."*

Development of personal skills leading to growth was a theme commonly identified by respondents. They strongly identify skills development with the development of a career in their voluntary activity. KT talked about *"doing the job and learning and maturing through it ... I wouldn't have those skills perhaps if I hadn't done it"* whilst KQ talked specifically about the development of people skills and communication:

*"So RDA has taught me how to look at people, find out what their individual needs are, what they intend in their life and actually talk to them about it ... it's helped me very much to be able to communicate with people."*

Other respondents talked about the need for them to continue learning as part of their voluntary activity. Many of them have a deep knowledge of the disabilities they deal with within the Group and display an obvious openness to continuing training so they develop their expertise further. For many volunteers, training and skill development occur organically and as they need it rather than through formally organised opportunities. The 'evolution' of EK's volunteering career was explained as a gradual process of helping out, watching some instructors and working with the physiotherapist, all these activities occurring in tandem with a large amount of practical hands-on experience, covering a number of years. Formal training is provided for volunteers as well as the informal sitting-by-Nellie approach found in all Groups, and many respondents were adamant that they needed such input alongside their informal learning. This juxtaposition of formal and informal development has not been fully explored in the literature of volunteers, but it

mirrors very well commonly accepted practice in professional human resource management. Although this does require more investigation to understand the extent of provision of both types of training for volunteers, this study provides evidence to support the concept of a volunteering 'career' as a viable and accurate one for this group of volunteers.

### 5.2.3 Third Characteristic: The requirement for significant personal effort

All participants in this study acknowledged that they put a great deal of effort into their volunteering with RDA. This extends beyond a simple commitment of time; although time, and turning up when you say you will, are a basic prerequisite and expectation of volunteers within the organisation. Several participants spoke of the need to focus on the activity at hand and not allow outside factors to distract from concentration on the activity. SI, a relatively new volunteer, said

*"I put quite a lot of effort into it at times but then I think everyone who is involved in this [does so too]"*

Many participants demonstrated that they expected to put in significant effort at all levels – one interviewee, CD, a volunteer whose family connection to RDA goes back generations to her grandfather, works part-time alongside her RDA commitments. Unable to do more than 'just' her role in the Group, she says

*"I'm happy to do anything locally. Because of my job, I can't give more than I 'm currently giving, so I'm not quite sure what else I can do"*

During the interview with CD, it was evident that she felt pressure to commit more time and energy than she was currently doing. The volunteers who interact with her regularly looked to her for guidance and talked of their expectation that she would take on more responsibility, even though she was very clear that she was not able to do so. EK, TN and TD all talked about the 'pressure' they felt from the administrative work associated with their roles and the concomitant need to work with people to get the information they needed.

This was presented as a cost of volunteering and demonstrated the efforts they go to in order to maintain their performance levels.

DT, another senior volunteer, suggested that ‘we are asking for a lot of commitment in our volunteers’, but that ‘when people get hooked, they are very committed’ – giving support to the views put forward in Cuskelly et al. (2002) that for some volunteers there is a progression in seriousness. In contrast with the findings of that paper though, these volunteers demonstrate increased commitment with increasing seriousness, as will be discussed in section 5.5.

#### 5.2.4 Fourth Characteristic: The existence of *durable benefits* such as self-actualisation, feelings of accomplishment, social interaction and physical products of the activity

One factor all participants agreed upon, regardless of how long they had been volunteering, the level of their contribution or the type of role they occupied, was that they gained palpable emotional, social and mental benefits from their volunteering. Many also spoke of skills improvement – primarily from Instructor training, but also business skills, safeguarding or financial management, for example. The benefits of volunteering for RDA are clear to see, in spite of the costs. The benefits discussed by participants varied widely, from the ubiquitous ‘fun’ to the comment from EK:

*“I think I would be bored silly without it, to be honest; it’s part of my life now and I enjoy it and I’ve learned an awful lot from it, I have to say, so I’ve got a lot back from it”*

DC ‘loves it, lives for it, gets a tremendous amount out of it’, whilst KK talked of the feelings of accomplishment when

*“I think, oh my God, this is scary but I sort of embrace it and go out and be brave if I can and carry on”*

TT, talking about her busy and progressive career said

*“Through all the ups and downs, dramas and excitements that life brings, RDA has actually been there for so much of my adult life and horses from young right up to now.”*

The length of time many participants have been involved with RDA shows that they feel they get enduring benefits from volunteering. The ongoing nature of their activities generates advantages whose value increases as they occur more. For instance, KQ talked about how RDA has 'expanded' her over the course of her time in the organisation. She suggested it had 'impacted on my life in a good way'. This was also expressed by other participants in the study, all of whom talked of the benefits they have gained and continue to gain through volunteering. Of course, the acknowledgement of such benefits sits uncomfortably alongside their unwillingness to admit to getting anything at all from volunteering, preferring to focus on the altruistic motivators for volunteering. Accepting that the latter is not a complete representation of the situation, but a response to the social world in which they find themselves, it is suggested that the existence of durable benefits, is one of the most clearly visible elements denoting the serious leisure characteristics of many volunteers in this study.

#### 5.2.5 Fifth Characteristic: The *creation of an ethos* of the activity – that is, shared attitudes, practices, beliefs, goals and so on

Defined by Stebbins (2006) as 'a special social world where participants can pursue their freetime interests', a *social world* has been defined as '*a unit of social organization which is diffuse and amorphous in character. Generally larger than groups or organizations, social worlds are not necessarily defined by formal boundaries, membership lists, or spatial territory ... must be seen as an internally recognizable constellation of actors, organizations, events and practices which have coalesced in to a perceived sphere of interest and involvement for participants.*' (Unruh, 1980:277).

For the participants in this study, the 'social world' of RDA is a key aspect of their experience and expectation. There are clear boundaries and rules of engagement: the expectation of a 'family' atmosphere is important – volunteers expect to welcome and accept other

volunteers without questioning their background or intention (“everyone is really family”: GX), whilst understanding that everyone has their own lives to lead outside RDA:

*“I found with RDA you’re allowed to be an individual, you’re allowed to have your own agenda, you’re allowed to do the amount of work that you want to do. You’re supported and cared for by people who, not just the riders but the people, the instructors and other people. It’s a very caring charity” (KQ)*

The latter point is important, signalling as it does the expectation of support, care and acceptance. Many participants talked of RDA ‘being there’ for them through life experiences, from a young age to more senior years, and the benefits they received from interacting with people of differing ages, backgrounds and expertise. In this sense, RDA truly becomes its own social world – especially when the variety of actors and stakeholders involved are considered.

It was alluded to in Chapter Two that the world of RDA is made up of many parts; the diagram below (Figure 5.1) maps the interplay between those parts to demonstrate the integration of the ‘constellation’ of actors.

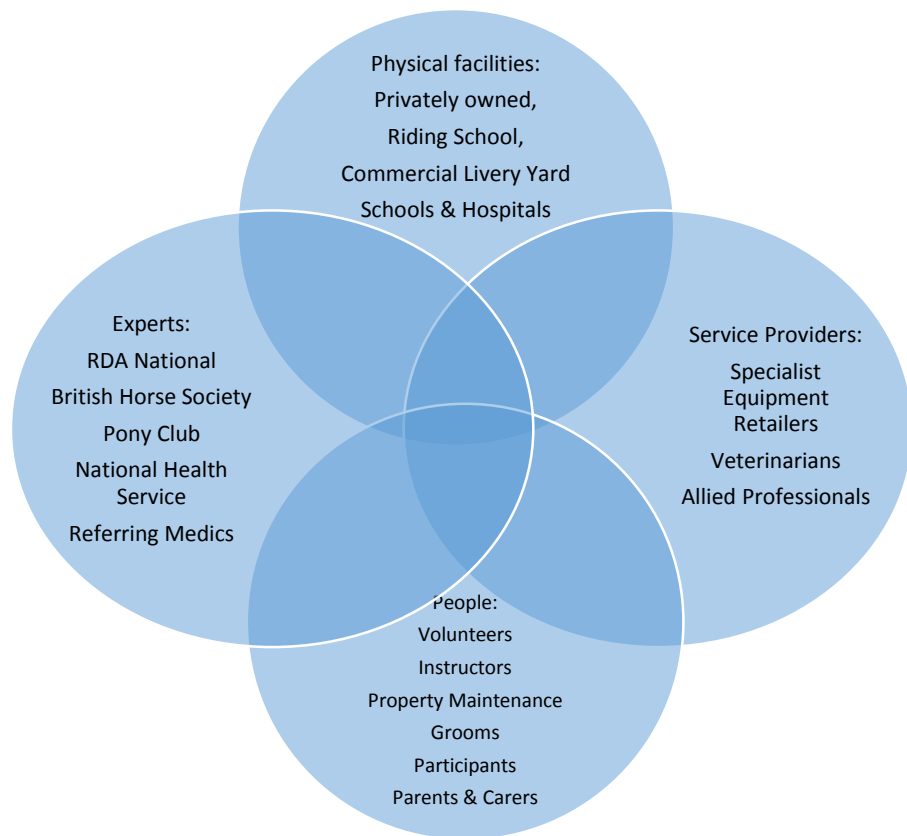


Figure 5.1 Understanding the actors in the Social World of RDA

The Social World of RDA is complex, consistent and stable – all volunteers fit centrally within it and understand – to a greater or lesser extent, that it exists. Each party named in Figure 5.1 makes a contribution to the operation of RDA – some (volunteers, parents & carers, participants) are central, some (the Experts and Service Providers) have a less consistent input but nonetheless operations would not happen without them. Each interacts with the others in a recognisable way to contribute to the ‘sphere of interest and involvement for participants’.

#### 5.2.6 Sixth Characteristic: Participants tend to *identify* with their serious leisure pursuit

*“I always say that I’ve got RDA through my centre like a stick of rock!”* (KQ). For the majority of volunteers, identifying RDA as ‘who they are’ rather than ‘what they do’ is central to their understanding of themselves. This theme emerged from the interviews unbidden and very frequently. It seems that the combination of achievement, strong relationships, horses and

encouragement is a powerful one which encourages volunteers to relate strongly to their activities and claim the activity as their own. Many participants demonstrated an understanding of their volunteering which is embodied the organisation's strapline "it's what you can do that counts!", and numerous examples were given of individual riders learning new skills or increasing their physical capability and therefore enhancing 'what they can do'. New volunteers who participated in this study also talked of the 'sense of belonging' and 'team atmosphere', implying that although they may not yet share the identity of more long-term volunteers, they could nonetheless see it and understand it. Therefore, identification with the activity is clearly an important part of the volunteer experience and one which is significant to volunteers' expectations.

### 5.3 Conclusion: these are Serious Leisure Volunteers

The evidence presented thus far in this chapter demonstrates that the participants in this study show clear evidence of their status as serious leisure volunteers. They fulfil all six characteristics identified by Stebbins. Furthermore, there appears to be little difference between the status of established, long-term volunteers and that of newer volunteers who express a very similar level of understanding of the nature of the activity, despite their newness. This finding will be explored further in section 5.5 below.

### 5.4 Implications of having Serious Leisure Volunteers for the organisation

Chapter Two explored the literature on Serious Leisure in detail and suggested that the generally uncritical acceptance of the concept by researchers might present some problems. Chief of those is the tendency to assume that Serious Leisure participants – in whatever activity they specialise – gain and deliver only good things. Whilst it is undoubtedly the case that many of the outcomes of seriousness are positive, there are nonetheless some outcomes which could be seen as more problematic. In many situations, issues of the

management of people take on a special importance. Pearce (1993) suggested that volunteers are often not the easiest people to manage. Within an organisation such as RDA, where volunteers are well embedded in the activity and bring significant knowledge of that activity with them, there may develop a power imbalance between the volunteer and the volunteer manager (who is themselves also often a volunteer). Serious engagement with the voluntary activity creates an expectation of control and ownership which does not sit easily in a hierarchical organisation such as RDA. The conflict thus created is undesirable for the smooth operation of the organisation as well as the experience of the volunteer. It is, unfortunately, commonly reported and observed. A counter-argument is often made that as a volunteer-led organisation, it is right that the majority of the control and power lies with the volunteers rather than salaried staff. The dynamic of power and ownership is sometimes played out even more strongly between the volunteers and the staff working at National Office than between volunteers and other volunteers. This power imbalance and its implications will be explored in Chapter Six. Chapter Eight will consider how the issues around serious leisure impact on the psychological contract of these volunteers and whether the combined theoretical framework has value for the study of volunteers.

### 5.5 Becoming a Serious Leisure Volunteer

It has been suggested in this and previous chapters that Stebbins' framework of Serious Leisure has explanatory power for the behaviour, commitment and growth of volunteers in RDA. During fieldwork, the idea of a 'route' of involvement came up several times in discussion and has proved to be an interesting area for exploration. Understanding how involvement in the organisation develops should inform the ways in which managers of volunteers might approach them, frame roles for them and manage their experience to attain the most positive outcomes for all stakeholders. This would lead to happier, more



committed volunteers who are easier to manage and retain than those with less positive experience of their sport volunteering.

Whilst acknowledging the longevity of many volunteers in sport organisations – both in this study and others (Cuskelly et al., 2006; Coleman, 2002), it is important to understand that not all will want to commit the enormous amounts of energy, time and often money that some do (Pearce, 1993). These less committed volunteers are no less important for that; without the ladies who turn up for a couple of hours each week to make the tea, put riders' coats on, keep the registers or sidewalk, Groups could not run and RDA would not provide the benefit it does to thousands of participants each year. Many volunteers in RDA would claim a 'casual' rather than 'serious' relationship with their volunteering. As Stebbins (2007) suggested, this is a valuable and important part of the resource mix and adds a broad range of knowledge and experiences for the organisation to draw on. Casual volunteers, however, will require management approaches which are differentiated from those used for serious leisure volunteers and this should be recognised at all levels in the organisation to ensure that they also have the best possible experience of engagement with RDA.

It has been noted in the literature (Lynch & Smith 2009; Cuskelly, Hoye & Auld, 2006:25) that there is a predictability about the way volunteers become involved in their activities. However, in the preceding sections of this chapter, another pattern has emerged in which newer volunteers appear to make deliberate decisions around the duration and purpose of their volunteering in a way that established volunteers deny was part of their early experiences. The remainder of this chapter will explore this pattern and suggest a model for the journey through RDA, noting the decisions a volunteer makes, the possible outcomes of those decisions and considering how these things relate to other studies of volunteers. In contrast to the marketing-oriented Volunteering Life Cycle model suggested by Bussell and Forbes (2002, 2003, 2007), the model suggested here is not cyclical; the experience

described by interviewees in this study suggests the volunteers are making a series of decisions which define a basically linear route through the organisation. These decisions provide the basis for volunteers to establish their position in RDA, become more embedded in the organisation and perhaps move on to new roles and responsibilities. As will be seen, each decision point also offers the option to reduce commitment or cease involvement altogether. The cycle of volunteering, therefore, is separate and perpetuated outside this model, as word of mouth and other recruitment methods precipitate the entry of new volunteers to the organisation.

#### 5.5.1 The route into RDA

The six characteristics of Serious Leisure create a specific picture of the person who fulfils them all. It has been established above that many of the participants in this study fit these criteria and demonstrate seriousness in their volunteering. However, the way people journey through an organisation to become serious has not been considered in the literature; therefore, neither – as discussed above in 5.5 – have the decision points at which someone makes choices about their involvement been identified. The data collected throughout this study indicated a common set of choices as people became more involved in the organisation, and a variety of decision points which influence their trajectory. Thus, they move either to a serious commitment, a casual approach to volunteering or exit from the organisation. This section of the chapter explains what these are and how they shape a volunteer's lived experience within the Group.

#### 5.5.2 Intentional Commitment

Whilst much has been written about the experience of serious leisure volunteers and the activities they do, there is little in the literature which explores the way people become serious in the first place. Stebbins (2007) suggests that people may become involved with a serious leisure activity through casual, project based or indeed serious leisure itself. The

process of 'becoming serious' however is yet to be fully explored by researchers. An unexpected outcome of this study was a series of examples of volunteers exhibiting an intention to be 'serious' from the outset – a finding which appears to contradict views expressed in the literature to date. It is suggested that this phenomenon may be explained, at least in part, by a cultural change in society. The latter idea will be developed in Chapter Eight.

#### 5.5.2.1 *New volunteers*

Newer volunteers who participated in this study displayed a different view of their commitment to RDA to the more established volunteers:

*"I knew very well that if I started here, I would probably be many many years before I give up" (SI)*

*"Well, I think what I'm giving now will probably be different to what I will be giving in a years' time when I know everybody better, and I know who wants to do what and I know where I can be most useful" (XU)*

These views suggest a more deliberate approach to volunteering as serious leisure activity than the approach shown by more established volunteers – who can also be classed as 'serious' (as discussed in 5.2). It may be that this is the result of a more structured recruitment and management practice by the group with newer volunteers than the more long-standing participants. It also raises the issue of whether, and how, managers should encourage potential volunteers to consider a serious commitment to their cause. In the case of organisations such as RDA, this may be a useful approach to take. It would be interesting to follow the RDA journey of newer volunteers such as SI and XU to understand how their route through the organisation is different to more established volunteers, and compare whether it is different at all.

### 5.5.2.2 Established volunteers

Many long-established volunteers commented that they understood more of the purpose of RDA as they spent more time volunteering; that, after the initial orientation phase, they saw more of the activity. IC, for example, put it this way:

*“I thought [it] would be a worthwhile thing to do, I could go and help children learn to ride, didn’t think that it was, you know, giving back to society. I appreciate that it is now but that wasn’t my motivation.”*

IC therefore expresses views in line with those expressed in the extant literature – that people begin an activity and ‘become’ serious over time as they gain expertise and feel part of the social world around the activity. This, however, is in clear contrast to the newer volunteers whose views are represented in 5.5.2.1 above. For the latter, there is a strong expectation that the activity they are embarking upon carries significant personal cost and provides a worthwhile challenge which will continue to engage them as an ongoing activity.

This finding appears to represent a development in the current understanding of serious leisure and, as such, will be revisited in Chapter Eight when avenues for further work are considered.

### 5.5.3 Stages of the journey

#### 5.5.3.1 First Contact

People are introduced to RDA in a variety of ways, but predominantly through one of two motivating forces. The first of those is ‘horses’; an interest in horses – wanting to be near them, finding a use for a redundant pony or recognising that one’s skills with horses needs an outlet – is an initial driver for many volunteers who come to RDA. In the study, this accounted for half of respondents starting to volunteer. The second factor was ‘disability’. This took the form for several respondents of having a disabled child, family member or friend. Other respondents talked about their volunteers who had come as a parent of a

rider, started 'helping' whilst the child was riding and remained long term. These are the most common reasons for first making contact with the organisation. Whilst it is true that many volunteers report being '*press ganged*', having their '*arm twisted*' or being '*told to do it*', there was always a latent or overt interest in horses or disability which created the interest.

At the point of first contact with a Group, the potential volunteer is introduced to others in the Group. Having a friend already there eases the way in, but each time the new person must make a decision: *do I fit here?* Do we have enough similarities for this to be enjoyable? Do I share the values these people espouse?

As discussed in section 2.8.1, the culture of this organisation can be defined as being strong, dominating every interaction between people. A lack of fit with the culture and values at the first contact is likely to lead to a decision not to continue with the volunteering. DT spoke of a new potential volunteer in her group who made the decision to exit from the activity at an early stage:

*"absolutely lovely, smiley, delightful person – but we had quite disabled children and she just couldn't take it, she got so upset"*

Similarly, KO related how a potential new volunteer turned up looking '*very smart*' but complained that "*it was very draughty, I had a chill the next day from your indoor school*". She said "*well, I don't think it's for me I did think I would just be more hands on with the children*". Again, the lady exited from the Group's activities at that early stage, having not found a fit with the Group.

The experiences of KO in her first contact with a Group may have influenced her understanding of this stage of involvement too. During interview, she talked about the first Group she went to making assumptions about her level of understanding and knowledge – potentially leading to a dangerous situation – rather than carefully assessing her skill level first. She found she was not greeted and treated as a valued individual and therefore

decided not to return. In the same way as the two examples above, she ceased to be involved in that Group. Her drive to contribute to RDA however, lead to her seeking out another Group to join. At the second attempt she did find a match to her values and expectations and has been there ever since. Of course, there is no way of knowing how many new volunteers who have an experience like KO do not seek out another Group which fits better with their values and therefore are lost to RDA at the first point of contact.

The first stage of the journey into RDA is represented, then, by the value match found at the point of first contact. Assuming this proves a fit, the new volunteer moves to the second stage, that of socialisation.

During interviews it emerged that ‘the horse’ all but disappeared in people’s stories at this point. Having provided the initial ‘draw’ to the activity, the focus shifts as volunteers move past the first stage and attention is turned to the participant (rider or driver) as the volunteer develops the skills to facilitate Group sessions in their particular role. ‘The horse’ remains central to the delivery of the activity, but beyond the very early experiences, it becomes a facilitator rather than being a focal point. This finding was very surprising to the researcher.

#### *5.5.3.2 Socialisation*

Once the potential volunteer has made the decision that this activity is something they choose to be involved with – normally a very quick decision taking only one or two sessions – they go through a period of socialisation in which they make friends and begin to become accepted by others within the Group. There is again an exit point at this stage: if the new volunteer’s expectations are not met, or people are not friendly enough (or overfamiliar, depending on circumstance), they may choose to exit the Group. This study did not encounter any volunteers fitting into the latter situation, but several participants talked about the experience of becoming socialised and making friends during this stage:

*"I always say if you can just get them [new volunteers] through the door and into a couple of lessons, they will either say 'this isn't for me' or they'll be there forever" (DC)*

*"You have to have someone with a nice friendly face at the door, you know, meeting and greeting." (KK)*

*"I was welcomed; they said yes we'd love to have you." (GT)*

The first impressions a volunteer receives are important; so too are the longer term 'early' impressions – it is important they receive a welcome, clear guidance about tasks and perceive an open, friendly environment. KK and KR are more established volunteers who reflected on their early days thus:

*"I love it at a group level. I've got great friends in that group and now we're all friends." (KK)*

*"It's a holistic thing, it's part of it, you are welcome, there is banter, there is stimulation, yes, there is everything" (KR)*

Sometimes, though, the early experiences exceed expectations. MC and GT suggested they did not expect to enjoy the activity but it – and the Group – changed their outlook:

*"I was pretty much forced into it and I was quite ambivalent about it ... I should think it took a term to realise that actually it was incredibly satisfying ... yeah, I got completely hooked by the whole thing" (MC)*

*"It wasn't altruistic at all. At that time I didn't have a horse at home and I could go [to RDA] and get my horse fix, and then I found that I was actually mixing with a nice group of people ... I just became quite absorbed and hooked on it really." (GT)*

As noted above in 5.5.2.1, newer volunteers in this study exhibit a different understanding of the nature of their volunteering. This stage of the journey also seems to be slightly different. XU reflected on the challenges of integrating into an established group. For her, it was a fairly easy process but she observed that was not the case for some others:

*"I can think of ways of making it smoother perhaps ... I can see some people who are perhaps a little bit less confident in themselves might just feel a bit lost for a long time, whereas I'm a bit stronger and just get in there and have a go at things." (XU)*

There is to be no set time period for this stage of the journey; for some a couple of weeks is enough, for others – like MC – several months is realistic. What seems to be most important, however, is that people feel heard and valued immediately. In this way, they begin to understand and relate to the culture of the organisation. TN spoke of the importance of respect for the new volunteer as well:

*“You’ve got to have mutual respect and I think for somebody coming into volunteering, if they don’t know a nose from a tail then you need to have somebody there that mentors them so they can learn the ropes and what goes on and how to behave and whatnot. I think that’s the first and foremost ...”*

If they are comfortable with this, they remain in the Group and move on to the third stage of the journey: developing a sense of belonging and becoming acculturated to RDA.

#### *5.5.3.3 Acculturation and belonging*

During the development of this model, it was expected that the third stage of the journey into RDA would be the longest. On analysis, however, it appears that culture transmission happens very quickly indeed. Culture is discussed in more depth in section 5.8, demonstrating that an understanding of organisational culture is vital in becoming ‘part’ of the Group. At this stage, a sense of belonging forms in the new volunteer as they understand more of the aims and ways of the activity and get to know other volunteers and participants better:

*“I think you do belong to RDA once you’ve been a bit. Perhaps not at the beginning particularly, except you enjoy what you’re doing but the sense of belonging comes along fairly quickly” (KT)*

*“You do work within your groups; just a little group of six riders, it’s quite a sense of family and joining together. I think it comes fairly quickly ... you do feel part of a cohesive group, which expands as you get more involved with RDA” (KT)*

*“I think if as a newcomer, [when you have] a new start to get involved with something, if you don’t feel welcome it sort of ostracises you and you may do it for a while but then you will just slip away and stop doing it because you’ve got to enjoy it. It’s very important to feel that you belong.” (TT)*

*“I’ve seen that everyone seems to be really happy and it’s a real team atmosphere and I think that sense of belonging and being useful will be what I get back from it.” (XU)*

The sense of belonging is very important to serious leisure volunteers within this organisation. Throughout interviews, they repeatedly asserted that they needed to feel that they belonged and were ‘part of something’; as discussed in detail in section 7.1.2.3, this forms a central part of their psychological contract. In the experience of the potential serious leisure volunteer, then, this phase is critical and formative. If Groups get the welcome wrong or appear ‘cliquey’, there is a real danger that the volunteer will not remain. In this case, as illustrated by the experience of KO in section 5.5.2.1, the new volunteer will



leave disaffected – damaging the reputation of the organisation as well as reducing the resource available to it.

During this stage in the process, there are several possible outcomes:

- The new volunteer experiences a fit with the culture but cannot or will not commit to a bigger or more regular investment in the activity. These follow the route to ‘reduce engagement’ and become casual or non-serious leisure volunteers. Such volunteers remain a very important element in the delivery of the service provided by RDA as discussed in section 5.4 and are not discounted by the Group. An alternative outcome is that they discover the regular Group commitment is simply ‘not for them’, but they want and are able to give occasional help and support through outside and one-off events: fundraising and so on. The new volunteer KO spoke of (cited in 5.5.2.1) fitted into this category. Increasingly, Groups are also using such volunteers to provide remote help through online activities and promotion.
- The new volunteer may fit well with the Group and plunge headlong into activities and belonging, but then experience ‘overload’ or ‘burnout’ and either reduce engagement to the status of occasional (rarely do these become casual volunteers) or cease engagement altogether. This situation was not encountered during the study but was mentioned by two participants. It may also be that this scenario is linked to psychological contract breach. This will be explored in the next chapter.
- The new volunteer feels the sense of belonging strongly and welcomes this. They commit to being part of the Group and become embedded, moving to the next phase of the journey, demonstrating the start of their serious leisure volunteering career.

#### *5.5.3.4 Embedding and Involvement*

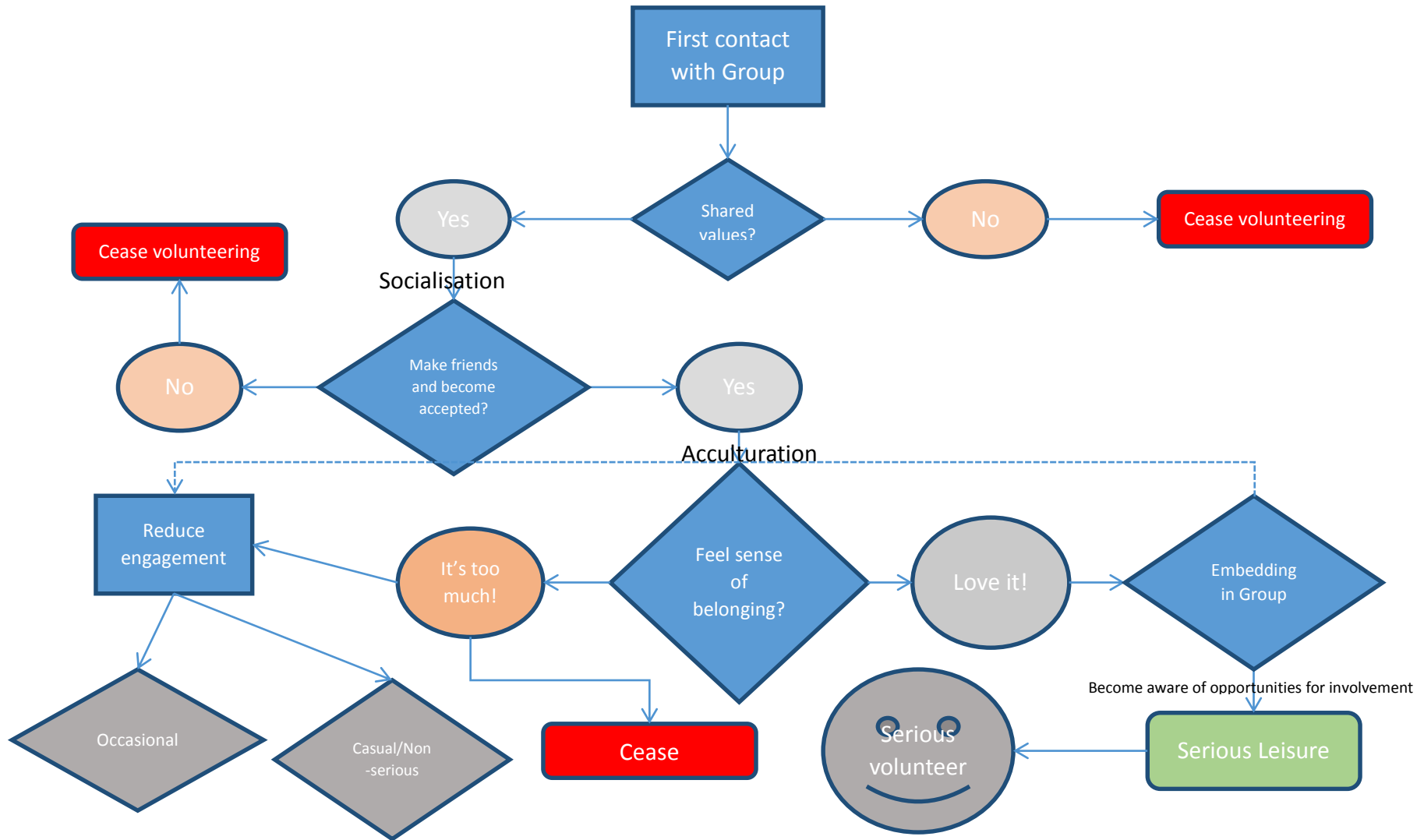
A volunteer who makes it to the final stage of this journey may be considered a serious leisure volunteer and it is likely that they will be the ones who stay long term, or return after

an enforced break due to factors such as study, family or career commitments. They will begin to display the characteristics of serious leisure as defined by Stebbins and discussed previously in 5.2.4, forming deeper social and friendship bonds with other volunteers.

It is from this status that volunteers start to experience the shift from altruism to personal gain through their volunteering, even if they do not like to admit to it. Personal gain comes generally in the form of satisfaction, friendship and support. Growth is another area which is reported to be important to volunteers: several participants in the study talked about learning new skills and increasing confidence through long-term volunteering with RDA. This is an important outcome of serious leisure activity, as was discussed above in 5.2.4.

*“I’ve seen people completely changed by the fact that they are giving something but are getting ten times more back because of the support they are getting ...” (KQ)*

Figure 5.2 The Volunteer's Route into RDA



## 5.6 The demographics of volunteers

Always perceived to be a concern in literature and practice, the demographic of the typical RDA volunteer is a problem for the organisation. IC voiced her worries for the future:

*“The way that society is going and the fact that ... the majority of women that work (sic) in this organisation ... increasingly are at work fulltime then that source of your middle aged female is just going to disappear ...”*

The consequence of this point is that people are perceived to be unwilling to take on the increased commitment and responsibility that comes with serious leisure volunteering roles, especially in the face of ‘paperwork’ challenges (see section below). EX told of her experiences of finding a successor to take over a role from her:

*“I managed to twist her arm; she took over from me, for about four years, but it takes a lot of time and she was working so I’m afraid [the activity] has fallen by the wayside.”*

On the other side of this problem is the experience of the volunteer who *wants* or *allows* her volunteering to take up more time than it possibly should:

*TT: I used to work full time and I cut that back to part-time and now I just work occasionally because you just cannot do it. You cannot really do the role properly if you’re trying to work.*

*GH: So you’ve actually given up work to do RDA?*

*TT: Yes, yes ... I’ve taken on extra staff at work to do some of the work I was doing, spread my work out. Fortunately it’s our own business so I can come and go as I want or else I just couldn’t have done it and yeah, basically I’m paying someone to do what I was doing so that I can do this [RDA] because there isn’t anyone else in the region at the moment [to do the role].*

This surprising admission demonstrates the self-limiting culture which seems to pervade some groups of RDA volunteers. There is a ‘helplessness’ when faced with recruitment and succession issues; people start from the position that either no-one is willing to take the role on or that no-one is able to take the role on. Earlier work carried out in RDA (Brooke-Holmes 2009) told a very clear story that many County Chairmen were unwilling to consider splitting the role, taking people to shadow them to learn the role or accepting help. In the face of such attitudes, and organisational culture, it is likely that fewer people will be willing to take the role on, therefore perpetuating the reported problems with succession in the

organisation. This should probably become a focus of attention for RDA: without new people coming into more senior roles, the organisation will stagnate and be unable to continue the trajectory of development and professionalisation which has created such progress since the turn of the century. Evidence presented in section 5.4 above and 5.7 below, however, suggests that this problem may not be such a big problem in the future: as more volunteers become 'intentionally serious' from the outset.

### 5.7 Younger volunteers

The increase in the number of 'young' volunteers in recent years was initially greeted by some volunteers with concern and scepticism. There is still a feeling, expressed by one or two interviewees that these volunteers, who come with 'extrinsic motives' – usually CV building – may not fully commit to the Group and may leave when they have got what they want from the activity. Talking about younger volunteers, KK said,

*"The young volunteers I have come across, some of them are great, and I know the theory that they will come back to RDA whenever they have had their families or whatever, but I see a lot of them just there to do their twenty hours or Duke of Ed[inburgh Award] or whatever it is ... they're just ambling around, they're just there to do their quota. I really feel some of them do look at it that way. It's sad."*

These reservations appear to be reducing, however, in the face of increasing exposure to young volunteers through programmes such as the Young Equestrian Leader Award scheme, run by RDA for the British Equestrian Federation. KQ expressed satisfaction with the flexibility that a younger cohort gave the Groups:

*"We have these other ones who will come in to do work experience. There will also be the ones that go to university and will come and give us a week's work during the summer holidays, something like that, but because we know what they are doing, we can [cope with] that. We can ring up: 'are you ready, are you back for holidays?' 'Yeah, why do you want me?' 'Yeah, can you come in next week because we're really short of people?' 'Ok, I'll give you a week's work.'"*

For KQ, this flexibility helps Groups to fill the gaps left by regular volunteers who take time out of volunteering during the school holidays, often to fulfil their own family commitments.

In this way, the 'less committed' younger volunteers make it possible for Groups to continue operating when they might otherwise struggle due to a lack of resource.

For volunteers such as GX, the early experience of volunteering is likely to shape the rest of their lives. KK (above) referred to *'the theory that they will come back ... or whatever'*. The Independent Sector survey (2001) suggested that 44% of adult volunteers began to volunteer during their adolescence and that people who volunteer as adolescents have twice the chance to volunteer as adults as those who do not volunteer as adolescents. DT discussed the return of younger volunteers once they are older and have families of their own, suggesting that *'once a volunteer, always a volunteer'*:

*"we have sixth formers from the Norwich School, and they are absolutely brilliant and they love coming to us – and very often there is a huge break and then later on maybe they've had their families or they've got married and they have a bit of spare time and they come back to it, if they are perhaps looking for something to do and they hear there's a local RDA group and they remember how much they enjoyed doing it for us and they come back to it."*

Although this was not a widely discussed experience in my interviews, it certainly mirrors my own experience and that of several of my friends. Historically, the recruitment of younger volunteers has been a weak area for RDA – the majority of volunteers for many years were 'white, middle-class and middle-aged'. However, since the early 2000s this has been changing and statistics from RDA now show that approximately 25% of volunteers are 25 years or younger. Therefore, the youth movements encouraged by RDA – whether Duke of Edinburgh awards, school volunteering or schemes such as the Young Equestrian Leaders Award are well worth running with a view to the future of the organisation.

If the evidence emerging from this study, discussed in 5.4 above, holds true generally for younger volunteers, then the growth in young volunteer numbers is a very positive sign indeed for RDA. If even a small proportion of young people may be beginning to volunteer with an intention to do so 'seriously' and for the longer term, this strengthens RDA's future resource base and potentially offers solutions to the succession challenges discussed in 2.8.1.3. Similarly to the intention to be serious from the start, the engagement of young

people with serious leisure volunteering has not yet been examined in the literature and is another area for further exploration. This theme will also be returned to in Chapter Eight.

### 5.8 The role of culture in Serious Leisure Volunteering

It remains to be seen whether an alternative culture might be developed by younger volunteers in RDA rather than them adapting to the pre-existing culture. During discussions which were loosely grouped around the theme of 'culture', it became clear very quickly that there is a very quick 'acculturation' process for volunteers, who then become an established part of the group. In the case of GX, who had only been volunteering for four weeks, the values of RDA could clearly be identified through her comments and actions, as could her acceptance of 'the way things are done around here'. She understood set processes and the reasons for them and expressed confidence to pass that understanding on to others – and also to be supported by more established volunteers. Initial considerations, based on extant literature, were that it might take time to establish the culture and that it would continue to develop in the awareness of volunteers through their first few years in RDA. This does not seem to be the case. Once volunteers had risen through the ranks, as in the case of most of my interviewees, the values and culture they expressed remained surprisingly consistent with those of GX and other 'new' volunteers. This suggests that the organisational culture is strong enough to be established very early and to remain steady for long periods.

There is no evidence of any 'counter-culture' within the volunteers interviewed. Perhaps the location of the interviews – taking place over the weekend of the National Championships, where emphasis is on participation and celebrating achievement, mitigated the stance of the more established volunteers; however, I did not get the impression that any of them were talking from a position other than one of absolute honesty and freedom. It was also noted, however, that few were particularly reflexive in thinking about their volunteering. Many respondents talked of the need for them to be flexible in their roles –

moving from Regional Instructor to County Chairman to Group Volunteer (or 'General Dogsboddy' as some suggested) freely as situations demanded; this would be consistent with them having one set of cultural values and norms across the organisation.

## 5.9 Conclusions

The evidence presented in this chapter demonstrates the existence of serious leisure volunteering as a form of leisure activity within one particular organisation. Each characteristic of Stebbins' framework of Serious Leisure is fulfilled in a stable and validated way. The framework describes accurately a large proportion of volunteers in RDA. All six characteristics are exactly as Stebbins suggests and we can see evidence of them all the way through the organisation, from the new volunteers who are aware of the 'need' for skills development and already see RDA as a big commitment for the future, to the longest serving volunteers who do not imagine a life without their RDA activity and totally accept its right to shape their self-image and the social world they occupy.

The chapter then discussed the journey a new volunteer may take as they progress through a number of stages to achieve 'serious' status. The diagram presented at Figure 5.2 suggests a journey through the volunteering experience whereby a number of decision points occur. At each of these points, choices have to be made by the new volunteer whether they deepen their involvement, remain static, change their role or reduce commitment to the organisation. The grounds for each decision are set out and explained. It is proposed that if they follow this journey all the way to the end, the volunteer has become 'serious' – that is, fully integrated and embedded in the organisation. This does not, however, necessarily imply that they will take on senior roles but that volunteering for the organisation has become an important part of their self-identity and lifestyle.

The hypothesis of 'intentional commitment' is also introduced; this being an extension of the serious leisure framework whereby a new volunteer makes a conscious decision at an



early stage of exposure to the organisation that they will 'be serious' in their volunteering. Conscious awareness of the six characteristics are not part of this decision, although each of the characteristics is clearly displayed to the onlooker; rather it is an outcome of the motivations of the volunteer and the cultural and value fit between new and existing volunteers. Other factors of importance are the new volunteers' acceptance of the stated and implicit ideological stance of existing volunteers, as will be explored in Chapter Six.

This understanding of serious leisure volunteering within RDA will be used to inform an examination of the psychological contract in these volunteers in the next chapters.

## 6 – The Psychological Contract (1): Meta-themes

Stebbins' framework of Serious Leisure suggests that some non-work activity may be viewed as a long-term, high commitment activity; one that gives the individual expertise and social networks which endure. For volunteers in organisations which make extensive use of long-term skilled volunteers, serious leisure forms an attractive – and maybe self-fulfilling – model. It has been established (Rousseau & Tijoriwala, 1998; Nichols et al., 2005; Starnes, 2007) that volunteers form a psychological contract with their voluntary organisation, and the concept of serious leisure has been applied to volunteers (Stebbins, 1996; Raisborough, 1999; Orr, 2006; Siegenthaler & Leticia Gonzalez, 1997 amongst others). Therefore, the question arises whether the psychological contract of the volunteer differs depending on their status as a serious- or casual-leisure volunteer. Having established in Chapter Five that many volunteers in this study are serious leisure volunteers, this chapter now explores the issues which inform the psychological contract but sit outside its 'content' by using the framework of Serious Leisure. Thus, it investigates the formation and continuation of the psychological contract of serious leisure volunteers in RDA. Mapping of the content of the psychological contract is done in the next chapter. This leads into a theoretical framework development thereafter in Chapter Eight.

### 6.1 Who is it with?

Discussion in Chapter Three emphasises that the 'pre-Rousseau discourse' is quite clear about the parties to the psychological contract: the workforce on the one hand; the foreman on the other. The blurring of these definitions is one of the defining characteristics of the contemporary discourse, reflecting of course the increasing complexity of the workplace and demands on employees in contemporary society. It may be that this confusion is even more pronounced and complex when we study volunteers compared with the psychological contract as applied to the traditional employment context as volunteers typically have an

even more informal and flexible role than employees and in addition may have a strong ideological aspect to their psychological contract to justify the effort and work they put into their volunteering. When Casser and Briner discuss the identity of the 'employer' they suggest that:

"Psychological contract theory is very clear about one of the parties involved – the employee – yet it is less clear about who or what constitutes the other party. This is evident in the various studies about the psychological contract in which some utilize the term "organization" to refer to the other party whereas other studies are more specific and use the term "supervisors", for example, to represent the other party." (Casser and Briner, 2009:679).

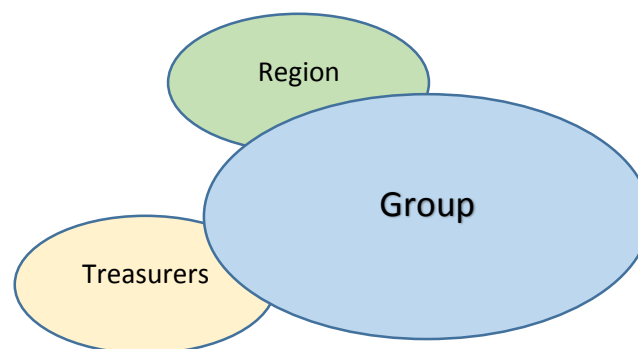
This lack of clarity in the 'contemporary discourse' is important: without definitions of the parties to the agreement, a psychological contract remains intrinsically the understanding of an individual rather than an agreement between two parties. This position is in fact the one taken by Rousseau (1990) when she explicitly considers only the employee's side of the agreement exactly because it is not straightforward to decipher who the psychological contract of the employee might be with. At this point, she discussed the tendency of the employee to create an 'anthropomorphic identity' of the organisation they are dealing with. Organisations are clearly not human actors, although they are comprised of human actors. The question then stands: does the employee create their psychological contract with an individual (manager, team leader, CEO) or with their understanding of the whole organisation? Indeed, it may be that aspects of the psychological contract are held with each of these parties, creating a multi-dimensional contract which cannot be easily deciphered, perhaps even by the employee themselves.

In this study, there were two clear 'other' parties to the psychological contract. By far the most commonly identified was the Group. This is where volunteers come into the organisation, have their first contact with the activity and form their first social bonds – in effect where the psychological contract is formed. Elicited by asking participants 'what do you understand by RDA?', every participant identified the Group first and foremost. This

question generally followed a discussion around their involvement in various roles and the types of people they came across in their volunteering. It was specifically intended to identify the party that was considered as the most important to the volunteer when they thought about the organisation. This acts as a proxy for the main party to the psychological contract. The secondary answer, given only by volunteers who hold Regional or National roles, was the Regional structure or National Office. These answers were as expected and demonstrate that the psychological contract can be with different parties according to who the volunteer most commonly deals with. TD, a Regional volunteer who retains very close contact with the Group in which she started out, said:

*"I think first and foremost it's our Group, but for me it's also closely, fairly closely followed by the Region."*

This clarity with regard to the parties to the psychological contract is interesting: these volunteers 'anthropomorphise' the organisation, as Rousseau (1990) and Guest (1998) discussed. They clearly see Group, Region and National as separate entities, each with their own relationship capacity. However, each of these parties is represented by a group of people who do not necessarily always act in a coherent manner.



*Figure 6.1 Example parties to the Psychological Contract and their relative influence for a hypothetical volunteer*

Although the actual – rather than perceived – identity of the ‘other’ is unlikely to affect the individual’s psychological contract, the various possibilities may provide potential for confusion when trying to understand the content or the management implications of the psychological contract. Figure 6.1 illustrates the concept. If the identity and relative importance of the other party can be determined when the contract is being examined, it will provide more clarity for understanding what the holder of that contract needs to satisfy them.

Looking at it another way, if the whole of the psychological contract is a book, it is possible to represent the identity of each party as a chapter forming that book. The main party will have the largest chapter, with smaller chapters taken up by other parties which also influence the contract. In the case of these volunteers in this study, the largest chapter concerns the Group, where the majority of the psychological contract is formed and remains regardless of the volunteers’ role. Other, less significant chapters may be about the Region, National Office, Instructors or Treasurers, for instance. Although they play a lesser part than the Group, each of these parties is important in creating a holistic image of the contract.

## 6.2 Antecedent Factors

Similarly to the parties to the contract, the factors predating the creation of the psychological contract are neither well understood nor widely acknowledged. Indeed, the literature is inconsistent with regard to the role of social and environmental factors, for instance Dick et al (2006) explored a constructionist approach to the PC, acknowledging the influence of ‘structural signals’ from the employees’ wider environment whilst Rousseau (1995:32ff) has ignored the possibility that factors external to the employee-employer relationship might influence the content of the PC – suggesting that the PC is formed from the first point of contact between employee and employer onwards. This study suggests, however, that in the case of volunteers, pre-existing understandings of the organisation and

its work, shared values and friendship networks may create an early form of psychological contract prior to any formal meeting taking place. This being the case, it would support the role of the structural signals referred to by Dick et al (2006) as being formative to the psychological contract.

The organisation being considered in this study is similar to many sport organisations in a number of ways: it provides leisure activity to its participants, it relies on voluntary labour to function, it is a serious commitment by those who contribute to it – both in time and expertise – and many volunteers come from the ‘social world’ in which it is located. This social world may encompass social status, family practice and custom or sometimes even an aspiration to belong to that world.

For volunteers such as CD, whose family involvement with RDA stretches back generations, it is clear that the key components of her psychological contract were handed down to her through exposure to the organisation and its values from a very early age. These elements have remained consistent in spite of the various roles she has performed and her time away from the organisation as she built her career. There is therefore a question of whose psychological contract she has: Chapter One discussed the considerable changes in the organisation throughout its history; for them to share a psychological contract which was originally formed by her grandfather, transcends organisational change and withstands the passage of time to such an extent would challenge existing theoretical understanding of the concept considerably. For many voluntary organisations, both within the sport industry and without, longevity of involvement (especially through family tradition) is not an unfamiliar concept and therefore to say that the PC is passed down would perhaps explain some elements of the continuous culture and practices seen in long-established sport clubs and charities across the UK.

It is also interesting to note, however, that volunteers in this study without a family history of involvement with the charity, such as SI, come into the organisation with a very clear set of expectations which are independent of communication from others. Rousseau, in her discussion of the formation of psychological contracts (1995: 32ff), considers only events occurring after the commencement of the relationship between employer and employee (often through the interview process, so predating the formal relationship). However, in this instance, SI expressed an expectation that he would continue to contribute to the organisation for some considerable time, would be willing to do whatever tasks were required and to participate in activities as directed – expectations which were, according to the data collected for this study, pre-existent to his first contact with the Group. The expectations SI communicated have been established in this study to form central aspects of the volunteers' psychological contract in this organisation (see Chapter Seven). Similar evidence was also expressed by other participants during interview. It might therefore be suggested that factors external to the organisation – whether predisposition from family, personal values or social cues – contribute significantly to the formation of the psychological contract long before the volunteer begins engagement with the organisation. It gives strength to the view that antecedent factors of the psychological contract are both extremely important and foreseeable – and therefore, if fully understood, may provide important predictors of the likelihood of volunteers staying with the organisation long term. This would assist organisations to manage the recruitment and retention of volunteers in a more informed way.

### 6.3 Early experience and recruitment

RDA volunteers are a sociable group; the majority of those interviewed began their involvement through an invitation from a friend or neighbour rather than through a deep-seated ideological belief in the cause. The extant literature suggests that this also holds true

for the majority of volunteers in other activities; Bussell and Forbes (2002) suggest that, for the theatre volunteers they write about, the *“most frequently cited source for volunteering is word of mouth. The majority of volunteers are attracted in the initial stages through contact with the theatre as a customer or through communication with existing volunteers. Many volunteers are also members of the Friends’ group.”* Also researching in the cultural sector, Lynch and Smith (2009) suggest that personal contact is a “principal route” into voluntary activities, whilst Gaskin and Davis Smith (1995) discussed the importance of family and friends when finding out about voluntary work.

The well-recognised ‘word of mouth’ approach is accepted as a normal method of recruitment for volunteers; interviewees in this study talked of attempting other approaches to recruitment but lamented their lack of efficacy: advertisements in newspapers, posters in supermarkets, contact with specialist volunteer agencies, talks at the Women’s’ Institute and in schools and colleges. Similar activities are referred to by Lynch and Smith (2009), so these appear to be commonly accepted practice, and Lynch and Smith make similar caveats to the interviewees in this study regarding the effectiveness of impersonal methods. All could boast an occasional success, but in general it was contact with friends and family that succeeded most often in bringing people in. Sometimes this contact was not described in the most positive of terms: some participants referred to ‘having my arm twisted’, ‘being hoodwinked’ or simply ‘being told I was going to [take part]’. There is a perpetuation effect in such invitations: generally speaking, the people we are friends with are similar to ourselves in significant ways; the ‘word of mouth’ effect creates similarity for the organisation and reinforces pre-existing culture and values. This ‘invitation to join’ stands separately from the identified motivators for volunteering, which are much researched (Cnaan & Goldberg-Glen, 1991; Smith, 1981; Knoke & Prensky, 1984; Batson, Ahmad & Tsang, 2002; Clary & Snyder, 1999; Hoye et al., 2008 and Wang, 2004).



The main motivations for beginning volunteering with RDA, in addition to the personal invitation from a friend, break down into either a wish to be near the horses (self-interest) or a wish to contribute to the welfare of the disabled (altruism), as discussed in section 5.5.3.1. However as discussed further on in that section, once they are involved with the Group, these initial motivators appear to lose their power somewhat and become less important in the overall picture. The personal invitation and the promise of relational benefits (friendship, meeting new people, enjoying a sociable activity) are the drivers for continuing involvement.

Normal practice when a potential new volunteer approaches a Group is for that person to be invited to come along to watch and meet others for a designated session. This is a chance for both parties to assess whether there is a degree of 'fit' and shared values which are likely to lead to a successful relationship (see figure 5.2). Furthermore, many Groups will try to ensure that at least two existing volunteers are available to talk to the potential volunteer about the roles available, time commitment and expectations of volunteers. This process, of course, represents an informal interview and as such forms part of a selection process for volunteers. It is doubtful that many Groups would agree that they were 'interviewing' new people – there is a fundamental opposition to any attempt to categorise what they do as 'business-like'. Interestingly, Davis Smith (1998) suggests that whilst 'a majority' of voluntary organisations claim to use interviews, only 14% of volunteers claim to have been interviewed for their post, suggesting that the process is both casual and non-intentional.

Vantilborgh et al. (2014) suggest that formalised training and induction programmes, as well as the provision of volunteer mentors for newcomers, help to provide realistic 'job previews' and set realistic expectations. Several interviewees in this study recounted examples of potential new people coming along and obviously not being suitable – inappropriate attire, unwillingness to 'muck in' (get involved in whatever task needs to be done) or fear of either

horses or disability. In the anecdotes told during interviews for this study, fear of horses was not presented as a barrier to volunteer involvement: there are plenty of non-horsey tasks which can be taken on, but fear of, or discomfort around, disability was a definite barrier to involvement – this reflecting the importance of the ideology of volunteering and setting expectations for new volunteers at a very early stage. The ‘unsuitable’ volunteers are discouraged from making a commitment, whilst those who do potentially fit are progressed to the early stages of initiation – usually several sessions of watching and learning before being allowed to take part in any of the activity. This process of watching and learning is accepted and justified by the Health & Safety, training and risk adversity requirements of RDA. Some groups do allow new volunteers to take part in sessions, but there is always a strong emphasis on supervision and safety; many larger Groups – which are perhaps not so desperately in need of help – frown on this practice.

One interviewee spoke extremely negatively of an experience where she was just ‘thrown in’ on her first visit to a Group (to which she did not return; she is now very established in another, larger, Group):

*“I went there, nobody greeted me, they grunted at me and they sort of threw some [tack], presumed I knew everything, you know ... can you go and get him in, brush him and tack him up ... and they were very undisciplined in the way they [behaved], there were girls walking round the outdoor school in flip flops ... it was just, I was horrified really. No one said ‘oh, see you next week’, no one said ‘who are you?’ ... quite a lot of our volunteers [in her current Group] wouldn’t be happy tacking up or getting them [the horses] ready so you know ... they just presumed I could do it, it was just totally different.” (KO)*

The processes of contact, selection and initiation covered above represent the early experiences of a new volunteer. In Fig 5.2, these are represented by the top two lines, where a lack of shared values, as in KO’s experience above, leads to a volunteer exiting the Group and possibly ceasing volunteering altogether. Where shared values are found – as KO discovered on trying the next Group, at which she has become very involved, the volunteer becomes socialised into the Group and becomes a ‘regular’. These early experiences clearly

inform the formation of the psychological contract and have a strong influence on the way the volunteer expects to treat and be treated within the Group.

#### 6.4 Socialisation and Acculturation

Expectations of volunteering having been set in the early exposure to the Group, new volunteers move through the 'socialisation' phase to become more established. During this time, they will learn the basic skills 'the RDA way', be trained so that they can complete their Green Card (basic competence certification) and develop deeper relationships with other volunteers so that they become an accepted part of the team. Many of the interviewees commented on this phase as being a difficult one to manage: volunteers have to be persuaded of the value of doing things the RDA way (this is often a variation on the traditionally correct method of handling horses, or the medically correct way of handling a rider, which may be at variance from more common, day-to-day habits), regardless of people's experience elsewhere. As Bussell and Forbes (2007) suggest, this is the stage at which *'a variety of relationships are established that can enhance or detract [from] the experience of the volunteer'*. When FE talked of friendships formed which overcome the barriers of geographical distance, it is the product of this phase of socialisation she is referring to. The socialisation phase relates unambiguously to the formation of the relational aspects of the psychological contract – the content of which is discussed in the next chapter.

Socialisation also reinforces the cultural values which make up so much of the psychological contract of volunteers and informs the ideological aspects which hold people to the organisation; Deal and Kennedy's (1982) *'the way things are done round here'* is well illustrated within RDA. It is evident that the culture of RDA is very strong and pervasive (see 5.5.3.3). The process of acculturation begins on the volunteer's first contact with a Group and continues throughout their engagement. As the literature highlights, it is extremely

difficult to find direct evidence of acculturation; however, the effects are very clear to see. This culture, which is easily defined as ‘collaborative’ in Cameron and Quinn’s (1999) competing values framework, over-rides every other input within RDA as it quickly becomes the identifying characteristics by which volunteers become recognised. Serious leisure volunteers display deep and whole-hearted acculturation, *“if you cut me in half, I will have ‘RDA’ printed through the middle like a stick of rock!”* (TT); whilst new or less ‘serious’ volunteers still display strong evidence of acculturation. These cultural affects might be separated into four aspects, all of which are discussed and explicitly demonstrated in Chapter Seven as being part of the content of the volunteers’ psychological contract:

- Norms of behaviour
- Acceptance and social support
- Respect
- Willingness to ‘muck in’

A fairly new volunteer, XU already has clear expectations of the ‘way things are done’ as well as demonstrating an intention to remain as a volunteer when she says:

*“Well, I’ve seen that everyone seems to be really happy and it’s a real team atmosphere and I think that sense of belonging and being useful will be what I get back from it.”*

Volunteers demonstrate a willingness to do whatever is required (‘muck in’ (Taylor, 2004)) to make the experience good for participants. CD says:

*“I think one of the greatest things of the RDA is that any of us is prepared to do whatever job is necessary, whether it’s picking up the muck from the school, out in the torrential rain, or it’s snowing and it’s bitterly cold and the wind’s howling and your hat [is blowing off] ... I think it’s just literally whatever is required, whether it’s for the horses or the people.”*

The willingness to do whatever job is necessary, stay longer and take on the duties of others is highly suggestive of Pearce’s (1993) ‘martyred leaders’, indicating a very strong commitment to the activities of the organisation and acceptance of their importance, at least equal to – if not greater than – one’s own activities. The theme of ‘martyred leaders’ will be returned to in section 7.4.

Some volunteers speak of being ‘conditioned’ into behaving in a way which fits the organisation, whilst emphasising the contemporaneous acceptance of individuality:

*“I found with RDA you’re allowed to be an individual, you’re allowed to have your own agenda, you’re allowed to do the amount of work that you want to do ... everyone’s allowed to have their say, you may not get what you want, but you’re allowed to say it.” (KQ)*

Values of respect for the individual, acceptance of difference and support came through strongly in the interviews:

*“You’re supported and cared for by people, not just the riders, but the instructors and other people. It’s a very caring charity and I’ve found with some of the larger charities that you were [just] a body to be used.” (KQ)*

*“I like to think of us as a family ...It’s the whole thing, the whole shebang, we’re all in it together.” (KK)*

*“So everyone is really family” (GX)*

KT was asked how she thought volunteers should be treated. Her response was definite and unequivocal:

*“Properly. Properly sounds silly doesn’t it, but you know ... with respect. You treat the person ... they’re volunteering as you are, but on the other hand ... if they don’t do the job well that they have been asked to do, then that has to be pointed out as well, but you still do it in a certain way so you should still treat them with respect.”*

A very interesting counter-example to this occurred when volunteers were discussing the ‘antithesis’ of their ideal volunteer: the over-involved and controlling, ‘professional volunteer’: they spoke of the dangers of ‘empire building’, expecting more commitment from other volunteers than they were able or prepared to give, that they lose the fun and enjoyment of the activity in the ‘earnestness’ of their volunteering. This discussion highlighted the importance of shared culture – and what happens when it is diverted to an individual’s own purpose. Above all else, using RDA to build one’s own power base is seen as absolutely inappropriate in an organisation where the satisfaction of one’s own needs and wants is considered to be a source of guilt and embarrassment.

For many volunteers, feeling part of what RDA does is essential to their experience as a volunteer. The evidence in this study so far demonstrates the importance of a strong culture,

both to the formation of the psychological contract but also in the creation of social networks which allow relationships to grow. The transmission of organisational culture to new volunteers is very fast – in some instances apparently predating commencement of volunteering – this also shapes the expectations volunteers develop of themselves and others. A strong sense of belonging is presented as one of the benefits of their volunteering; it gives a social status and fulfils a relational need which is highly valued. KT talks of ‘a sense of belonging ... the atmosphere of RDA ... a cohesive group’ and clearly from the interviews in this study, this is an important part of volunteers’ psychological contracts.

## 6.5 Benefits of Volunteering

The benefits of volunteering have been widely discussed and proven in the extant literature (Surujlal & Dhurup, 2008; Smith et al., 2010; von Bonsdorff & Rantanen, 2010). Providing mental health and physical benefits as well as building social networks and increasing civic engagement, voluntary activity has been seen by some – particularly in political circles – as being the panacea for many societal ills. It is, therefore, obvious that anticipating benefits from volunteering will influence the psychological contract. This area was examined to try to understand more about what volunteers perceived they gain from their RDA activity.

### 6.5.1 Key themes – altruism

Several key themes emerged in the data; the first may be broadly defined as ‘selfish altruism’, denoting gaining pleasure from the act of benefitting others. A young and new volunteer, GX, commented

*“The reason I come in is to get to see little [name] smile at you as he says ‘I did it’ when his horse trots. I think it is the reward, that you know you are helping”.*

SI told me that it is “lovely” to

*“help people who are disadvantaged really and erm yes, seeing them smile and enjoying themselves”.*

Similarly, KQ, an older but fairly new volunteer told me,

*"I have had a good life, I am very privileged, I just want to give back and impart some of my experiences and knowledge just to make it work".*

However, she went on to say:

*"Sometimes I go ahead and think yes, right, I contributed something today. That's good, right, I sleep well!"*

MN, another relatively new volunteer who has a management role in her Group, commented,

*"I get back more than I give, even though I feel that I give quite a lot I get a huge amount back and it never crossed my mind when I first thought of volunteering. Never thought that, I just thought it was going to be me giving, I never realised that there would be a return".*

Interestingly, no interviewee shrunk away from acknowledging the time and effort they put into RDA. However, KT approaches the area of the psychological contract when she says,

*"[I get] Enormous satisfaction and great fun, and even the grotty bits are very stimulating. If a group's having a fight and I'm trying to sort it out, in a funny sort of way I rather enjoy it ...chuckle... and so it does, it gives me back an awful lot, I have so much fun doing it, so erm, that's what it gives me, it is fun, and the people are so nice. I mean all of us downstairs are having fun. We're working, as you do in RDA but you enjoy it, you go because you're enjoying it, and if we weren't enjoying it we'd go away".*

These volunteers are not denying themselves whilst improving the lives of others. All are very clear that they enjoy their volunteering, that they expect to enjoy their volunteering and that they expect others to enjoy volunteering. In this respect, enjoyment seems to be a 'transaction' of volunteering. MC comments,

*"I think if I didn't get something back from it, I wouldn't do it, would I?"*

There is, however, another side to volunteers' understanding of altruism, as was highlighted in a memo written during the interview period and reproduced below. Haski-Leventhal (2009) suggests that Nagel's (1970) perception of altruism as an inner sense of duty (following Kant's deontology) suggests that volunteers should act for the benefit of others first, regardless of benefit to themselves. If this is the case, it would explain this sense of guilt felt by MC when admitting to 'enjoying' or 'getting something back' from her RDA

activity. In her discussion, Haski-Leventhal suggests that “people have a direct and rational interest in helping others, without the need of moderators such as sympathy, justice and rewards and therefore altruism and rationality [in the action of the volunteer] are not distinct.” (p291). Although MC was the only volunteer who explicitly mentioned the ‘I shouldn’t say this ...’ feel good factor, it was implicit in many interviewees’ responses. Research memos from the weekend of interviews frequently record looks of horror on the faces of my ‘ladies’ when we were talking about their enjoyment of RDA. For reasons which will become clear, this lady remains anonymous:

*She was being a little evasive; I probably misinterpreted the body language so I pushed a bit harder for her reasons. She said “I enjoy it”, and she looked dumbstruck. She went slightly paler and then followed the comment up with a gasp and said “but I shouldn’t, should I – or at least, I shouldn’t admit it. It feels so wrong to enjoy it, when it’s them [the riders] who should be enjoying it.” When I suggested that there was probably room for everyone to enjoy the activity – after all, that’s why volunteers volunteer – she agreed, grudgingly but still clearly felt very uncomfortable with the concept.*

*She came back to me the next day and told me that she’d prefer that no-one else was told about her admission; she feared that others would not respect her so much if they knew. (memo 15, 14<sup>th</sup> July 2012)*

## 6.5.2 Key themes – personal development

The second broad – more easily acknowledged – category of benefits is ‘personal development’, or improving self-knowledge, -confidence and -esteem. The predominant demographic of RDA volunteers, as discussed previously, is older and most volunteers are no longer in the workplace. The role that volunteering plays in building their skills, making them confident in their abilities and enhancing social networks is significant. It seems that RDA improves the lives of its volunteers as well as its participants.

TT, a volunteer for over 30 years, explained how volunteering has helped her to gain confidence and build her self-esteem through service to RDA:

*“also just being able to put something back because you don’t necessarily realise you have skills until you start doing something and you think well I thought everyone could do that because it’s just second nature to me to go out and talk to complete strangers or just stand up in a room full of people and say “I think this “, where some people feel they just can’t do*



*it whereas you just think it's normal, so you get actually a little self-esteem and think well that was good, but I can do a little better and so it boosts your confidence in a lot of ways. It makes you think there are things you can do, things that you took for granted so it's great, I love it".*

Additionally, she talked about the learning opportunities provided by her volunteering. The continual development of volunteers was a common theme amongst interviewees, and demonstrably a valued outcome of being part of RDA. This learning is active learning, put into action immediately and producing instant results. TT's reference to 'still being useful as (she feels she is) getting older and decrepit' is indicative of the kind of value and contribution volunteers feel they gain from being part of the Group and being able to make a difference to people's lives:

*"it's nice to be able to stay involved, but this is very rewarding because there's always new riders coming in, there's always new disabilities you're learning about and trying to help, getting other people in to, you know, to assist. I feel very privileged and able to be involved and now to be helping other people, because you don't actually realise you're able to until you actually get the feedback and you think 'oh perhaps I'm not so bad, perhaps I am still useful as I get older and decrepit..."*

KQ reflected on how RDA has changed her outlook on life and given her opportunities she may not have otherwise gained:

*"It's up to me if I want to take the qualifications. It's given me an awful lot of friends ... it's expanded my views on life. I live in a very little village in [remote part of the UK], I could have quite happily stayed there my whole life, that's the thing. This has expanded me. I'm at the National Championships, I'm seeing people and meeting people with other ideas so yes it's not going to mean anything monetary wise but it has impacted on my life in a good way".*

Some volunteers were very open about their personal growth:

*"It's partly, if I'm truthful about myself, I'm very unconfident, so I just think I can't do it, so it always amazes me when I can, and I think, since being [role], I've actually, that's helped me hugely as well because people are really nice to me and think I do ok, and that's, you know, that's good and it's helped me too!" (MC)*

Many interviewees talked of the friendships that they had formed through volunteering with RDA; the 'family' nature of the organisation is an area which came through these interviews very strongly: 'camaraderie', 'support', 'fun' and 'friendship' come through the transcripts time and again. EX, who had moved away from the location of her first Group, commented

*“I’m still in touch with people up there, and I know more people, in fact I know a lot of people up there and they still say hello in the street, you know, and I’m still in touch with some at Christmas time, so that’s really good, they were very good ...”*

The social environment, therefore, comes through as a very strong motivator and benefit for volunteers. It is important for the organisation to be mindful of this factor and to encourage social interaction between volunteers, even though it may seem to be outside the scope of normal activities. These form part of the ‘relational’ aspects of the psychological contract. Without this ‘social glue’, which makes the overcoming of significant obstacles desirable in the mind of the volunteer, it is entirely possible that the complexion of the volunteer body would look much less stable and tenacious.

It was interesting to explore volunteers’ attitudes to personal development through their RDA activity. This is not an area which has been explicitly mined in the organisation before, and in the context of this study, and these interviews, it was considered to be a ‘side issue’, although one I expected to be of significance to a few volunteers. However, the comments made by interviewees suggest that personal development does indeed feature strongly in their psychological contract, as it would be expected to feature in the psychological contract of an employee. In our conversations, there were two tracks to this exploration: the volunteers’ own experiences and reflections on, or considerations of, the experiences of ‘their’ volunteers.

### 6.5.3 Key themes – skill development

The theme of ‘skill development’ was in most cases applied to ‘others’; CD told the story of

*“people who – with the recession – can’t get work. They come up here and, of course, in the back of your mind, you’re thinking ‘how long are they going to be with us?’, but you have to go through the induction, you’ve got to train them up and they’re great, and they are often young, and what we are finding is that it boosts their confidence and it adds to their CV ...”*

Just as KQ told the story of the single mother who moved back closer to family with her disabled child, these incidences reflect the role of RDA activity in developing transferable skills which help the individual to (re)enter the workplace. DD told of volunteers who

gradually develop their confidence in her group and therefore become more 'useful' in their multi-skilling:

*"there are so many other roles they can do, sometimes it's helping in the kitchen, sometimes it's a little bit of admin, even just helping children put hats and coats and things on, helping with rider profiles and taking note of horse usage, there's all sorts of things they can do, but many would come saying that [they only want to 'help out', not be around the horses] and end up saying, you know, 'could you show me how to tack up?'"*

Skill development is an accepted part of RDA activity, part of the 'improving lives' strapline and part of the culture of the organisation. Established volunteers tell their own stories which echo those of DD's volunteers; of entering their voluntary activity with limiting beliefs, out of date skills or a general lack of confidence but slowly gaining what they lacked as they started to believe it when *"people are really nice to me and think I do ok!"* (MC). EK told the story of her 'journey' through RDA – to a very senior position – thus:

*"... It all sort of evolved really – I helped with other rides and then I started to see some of the Instructors and I thought, you know, I could do that and I learned an awful lot from the physiotherapist and I worked with her and learned a huge amount, so I thought well, I'm going to go and get my badge [Instructors' qualification], which I did and it all sort of evolved. ... I think being an instructor was almost for me, to think that I had achieved something, because I never thought that I would be able to do it."*

GT talked about finding it 'easy enough' to encourage volunteers to think about developing their skills through doing more administration or becoming a trainee instructor, although everyone was keen to emphasise that this development was a choice, not a requirement. If volunteers want to stay doing just one role, that is acceptable, although as noted elsewhere, some interviewees expressed conflict when trying to understand the motivations of volunteers with very different understandings of their commitment to their own. There were a couple of mentions of over-zealous encouragement to greater commitment, which tended to be stopped by more senior volunteers who recognise that some people will not share the serious leisure perspective. GT continued:

*"I think one has to be terribly careful not to suddenly push people out of their comfort zone before they are ready ... give them time to get used to everything, give them time to decide whether or not they are ready to commit, but yeah, I think you can encourage people."*

Thus, it is clear that personal development is expected and encouraged for volunteers – although this may take a number of routes. Stereotypically, these routes are into instruction or management roles for serious leisure volunteers; many interviewees did not like the term ‘career path’ in my questions, but after discussion concluded that the concept was fair, even if the terminology was inappropriate. Examples were also given of job-related competencies being developed and probably the most prized development was the move of the non-horsey volunteer to involvement with the horses – a very valued development of skill. For many of the senior volunteers interviewed, their achievement through RDA formed the basis of a growth in personal confidence, skill and surety – very clear evidence of volunteering as self-actualisation in Maslow’s (1943) terms.

## 6.6 Challenges – people and paperwork

There is a perception amongst volunteers, perhaps propagated by the literature in the area, that volunteering has become more onerous due to increasing demands of ‘paperwork’ and ‘restrictions’ caused by professionalisation over the last few years. These interviews bear out that perception to some extent, although only one in five of the interviewees talked directly about these types of demands. I have included ‘people’ in this section, recognising that much of what volunteers do is deal with the challenges of people, but also recognising that for some volunteers this is a much more visible challenge than for others. More than half of my interviewees talked about the challenge of people management, indicating that people are a bigger challenge than paperwork.

CD started off by talking about the difficulty of *“trying to get one person to meet the criteria for [the role of] Volunteer Co-ordinator”*. She solved this by having two people take on the role: one to deal with the ‘horsey’ aspects, the other to deal with the ‘people’. Varying skill sets were a common theme, often focussed around the disconnection between volunteers’ professional lives and their RDA activity. FE, for instance, said

*"I come from a [professional] background, and I don't see that proper structure and support for people all the way along the line. ... You can't criticise volunteers in the same way you would [an employee] and it is very hard to find a balance between criticising them but wanting them to volunteer. ... You need them. ... I don't think we are professional in achieving that standard."*

Regional Chairmen, who are normally ex-County Chairmen, made some fairly robust comments about their successors in the County role. GT commented about her successor:

*"She doesn't fully appreciate why the volunteers are there ... she just ... keeps forgetting that everybody else has got a life going on around what they do, and I think sometimes people are too single minded and they get too focused on trying to ... tick every single box and they lose sight of the whole and the fact that if you're going to get people to achieve and want to stay on with you, you've got to be very flexible and you've got to be thankful that they're there ... I mean, to keep a happy group you have to appreciate your volunteers, to find a very tactful way of getting them to do what you want."*

Another Regional Chairman said,

*"our present County Chairman does hardly anything to be honest ... there's been a lot of political things going on in the County which I think she's finding very hard to deal with." (IH)*

Unfortunately, that person was not available to be interviewed; it would have been interesting to hear the other side of the story.

There were a few similar comments around 'politics': KT put it very eloquently:

*"The trouble is with groups you end up quite often with a little coterie of people running the groups and they get one of their mates in to fill the vacancy, where sometimes there could be somebody else that could fill that vacancy but perhaps would not fit in with that little coterie of people quite as well, but they would be very good at doing the job but are not given the chance."*

KR, who carries the responsibility in her group for an unpopular area of regulation, made possibly the understatement of the interviews when she said

*"I need to be very, very careful because of the ... nature of [regulation] and the old school volunteers who have been here 20, 25 years ... throw their hands up in horror and say 'this is the way we have always done it!' **So I need diplomacy.**"*

Diplomacy was a common theme, and TT talked about the challenges of introducing new practices when:

*"some groups have a Chairman for a long long time and so they do run it their own way and have their own definite feelings about things and if the group is running well it's very hard to go in and say 'I think you should be doing this and have you thought about trying that?' because they've probably had the same answer for the last twenty years."*

In contrast to the commonly acknowledged challenges of people, paperwork only had a few mentions. DT introduced the theme of pressure and responsibility (but tempered by acknowledgement of the benefits of standardisation) thus:

*“Paperwork has not decreased, responsibility has not decreased and ... everybody wants their piece of what you must comply with, but overall, the service has improved, the quality of the service and the quality of the training, all the way up and down the line is much more even throughout the country as a result of this.”*

EK said her motivation had “wilted a bit lately with all the paperwork we keep getting ...” and IC talked about “the pressure” of paperwork. Others mentioned emails as a constant demand:

*“there’s always something to do” (MC)*

TN, a Volunteer Co-ordinator, likened getting information out of volunteers to

*“trying to get blood out of a stone.”*

There are, therefore, plenty of challenges. Some interviewees suggested solutions: KQ reflected that

*“all the Headquarters type [National Office] can do is support ... maybe some training for County and Regional personnel ... on psychology or something on ... the dynamics of groups and how when you get certain people together, this is who they will react, and some ideas of how to deal with certain reactions to situations. ...”*

She continues:

*“the majority of people who are volunteer County and Regional Chairmen do not have the background or the knowledge of how to [deal with problems].”*

The latter statement is contradicted by many volunteers, who claim business backgrounds and consider themselves to be well equipped to deal with the challenges – that RDA continues to exist in its current form, with relatively few issues being escalated to Regional and National level – suggests that the ‘leadership’ is indeed equipped by current or previous experience; perhaps however there is an opportunity for the organisation to capture that experience and share the backgrounds of its more senior volunteers more widely in order to reassure others.

## 6.7 The effect of time on the psychological contract

As discussed in section 3.3, work on the effect of time on volunteers' commitment, psychological contract or motivation is very limited. Some writers have suggested that changes occur in the psychological contract over time. As this study considers both volunteers with significant time in the organisation as well as newer volunteers, this was an area of interest to the study. If it is the case that the psychological contract changes over time, it would be desirable to be able to understand those changes to better understand how the psychological contract is constructed at different stages of a volunteers' engagement. However, this is not a well-researched area, especially in volunteers. The first article to appear on this subject was Robinson, Kraatz and Rousseau (1994), who conducted a longitudinal study of a group of employees over 2 years with a focus on the difference between transactional and relational contracts. They concluded that contracts change 'strikingly' over the initial years of a relationship. They suggested that individuals are more likely to scale down their expectations than employers are to scale up their responsibilities. Where the contract is violated in that period, the expectations of the individual will change and rebalancing will occur – mostly by the employee. Lester et al. (2007) used a two-phase survey of employees over a period of 6 months. The sample used in that work was of varied experience in the organisation, however (average tenure approximately 2 ½ years), and therefore measures of change were more likely to be related directly to occurrences in the organisation than purely as a result of subjects' increased time in the organisation. Their discussion suggests that an organisation's commitment to maintaining the relationship with employees is vital to the maintenance of a relational psychological contract and that, without that commitment, employees will review the balance between transactional and relational aspects. Furthermore, they suggest that factors such as previous communication and external conditions will influence an employee's understanding of how the organisation

communicates and delivers its message. When these factors do not adequately align, the employee is likely to review the psychological contract.

These studies were conducted in employment contexts, however – which are naturally very different to a voluntary context. Within RDA, the long-term volunteer is the norm rather than the exception, as evidenced by the 434 25-year service awards given out by RDA between 2007 and 2012 (email from National Office, 20 January 2014). The volunteers interviewed for this study did not acknowledge the influence of time as being of significance to them. Most of the established volunteers did not come into volunteering with the conscious intention of making a long-term commitment, but rather *'just got sucked in'* and stayed. There was evidence of a cycle of involvement by committed volunteers, from group to County/Region/National and then back to group as they stepped down their activity in later years, reinforcing the commitment to the group as their primary affiliation.

This is an important area in the study of long-term volunteers and will have strong implications for management. However, the data which emerged from this study did not generate clear proof of whether the psychological contract of the participants had changed over the course of their time in RDA. Anecdote and observation, together with the combined findings discussed elsewhere in this thesis, suggest that there is very little change over time for these volunteers – the influence of strong norms and clearly transmitted culture seem to shape the content quickly. This is an area which deserves further study and would yield valuable insights for voluntary organisations.

## 6.8 Analysing volunteers

The challenge of understanding these volunteers was well expressed by CD, who said

*"Our volunteers volunteer because they want to volunteer"!*



Whilst this does not express motivations or underlying expectations with any clarity at all, it is symptomatic of many senior volunteers' refusal to contemplate underlying issues which would explain the motivation of other volunteers. Were they to take a more analytical approach to understanding the people they rely on, it would perhaps help them to address some of the problems they perceive they face. Simply taking the line that people volunteer without reasons which can be understood and analysed encourages an attitude of helplessness which is at odds with the general drive and determination seen in RDA volunteers and evidenced in this study. It is puzzling also, considering that CD is a younger, professional lady who demonstrated an in-depth understanding of human resource management during our interview. It almost seems as though people put blinkers on where human behaviour and RDA meet – perhaps that questioning the values and motivations of others is outside the social mores of RDA. No-one in RDA would think twice before analysing the reasons for a horse's behaviour – but that standard is not applied to the volunteers. In the context of the study of the psychological contract, this might be understood to be due to the overriding importance of accepting people as they are and not judging. However, there is also a bigger issue at stake: the main unit of operation is the Group – a tightly knit group of people performing specific activities within a wider structure. Many Groups report a consistent shortage of volunteers – a pattern which is even more troublesome at County and Regional level. It may be that part of the culture of RDA is an unwillingness to examine the reasons for people volunteering due to a fear of finding that they might not like what they see. Better perhaps to not examine motivations too deeply and simply accept with gratitude what people 'can give'. In this sense, the serious leisure volunteers avoid putting pressure on the non-serious leisure volunteers and instead carry the burden themselves, representing Pearce's (1993) 'martyred leaders'.

## 6.9 Conclusions – the big issues surrounding the psychological contract

The themes covered in this chapter demonstrate that there is much more to the formation and continuance of the psychological contract than simply identifying content or understanding the differences between its various aspects, although these are very important, as shall be discussed in Chapter Seven.

The psychological contract is always perceived to be between two parties, although the identity of one of the parties is not clear in the literature. This study establishes that the volunteers in RDA hold their primary psychological contract with the Group with which they have (or had) the majority of their experience. A secondary 'other party' emerged for volunteers who hold Regional or National roles; that secondary contract sits alongside the primary one, it may be slightly different in content, but this does not create tension in the mind of the volunteer. Where there is role conflict due to pressures of time, the primary contract takes precedence and the volunteer will retreat to the Group level.

Factors influencing the formation of the psychological contract are much debated. This study found that volunteers accepted many formative influences on their psychological contract; mainly from social cues and the experiences of people already involved in RDA, but in some cases also from family members and historical influence. Other people within and without RDA are also part of the formation of the psychological contract; this study confirms that the way new volunteers are socialised is very important to their understanding of the organisation. It has already been established in the Chapter Five that the culture of the organisation is very strong and stable; this forms a base on which volunteers are able to build their knowledge and expectation of the activity.

One of the advantages of allowing volunteers to explore the issues with the researcher is that these issues were exposed naturally: each participant was comfortable talking about how they came to develop their understandings of what they do within RDA and how it fits

their personality and world-view. Exploring the benefits of volunteering was a sensitive issue which exposed unexpectedly tender areas, confirming in part the guilt associated with gaining benefit from an activity which was supposed to benefit others. However, all volunteers revealed the deep satisfaction gained from their activities, as well as naming benefits which are consistent with those identified in the extant literature.

For many volunteers, RDA brings the constant challenge of dealing with difficult situations (and sometimes, people). The challenge of volunteering has not yet been considered in the literature of the psychological contract but sits very comfortably within the serious leisure literature. This, then, is an area where serious leisure theory has clear contributions to make to the study of the psychological contract and is a theme which will be returned to in Chapter Eight.

Another area which has clear implications for psychological contract theory is that covered in 6.7: the effect of time. Although the participants in this study ranged from very new to very long-standing, the analysis which emerged deals only with their current status. It would be very informative to conduct a longitudinal study of the content of the psychological contract in an organisation with a stable volunteer population, covering a much longer time period than has currently been done; thus establishing whether the psychological contract does indeed change over time – and if so, how. Understanding this would provide researchers and managers with tools to influence the journey of volunteers through their involvement and ensure their satisfaction.

Each of the areas covered in this chapter contribute to our understanding of the psychological contract, whether of volunteers or employees, and add to the pool of knowledge in existence. The next chapter will investigate and map the content of the psychological contract of the volunteers in this study in depth.

## 7 – The Psychological Contract (2): Content

The theoretical understanding and development of the psychological contract was discussed in Chapter Three. What started as a simple implicit understanding of ‘the rules’ between workers and foreman has become a whole field of study, encompassing many approaches and ways of categorising a relationship. The separation of elements of the contract into transactional, relational and ideological has made it possible to understand the content of the contract in much more depth and detail. The prevailing view within the published literature is that all these elements may coexist in a single psychological contract, but that the three are not exclusive to each other: rather than being a continuum with ‘transactional’ at one end and ‘relational’ at the other, for instance, each element has its own relatively independent continuum (Conway & Briner, 2005:44) and it is the combination of positions which forms the whole of the contract. This of course allows for many different variations and explains the individual nature of each person’s own contract.

Two key findings emerge from the data in this study and are discussed below:

- The psychological contract of the volunteers in this study can be separated into discrete outcomes:
  - What I give
  - What I receive
- Some elements of their psychological contract show evidence of reversal from that identified in the extant literature.

### 7.1 Aspects of the psychological contract

#### 7.1.1 Transactional elements

As discussed in section 3.1.6, the transactional aspects of a psychological contract are associated especially with short-term employment contracts and limited commitment situations (Rousseau, 1995). This being the case, it can be suggested that transactional elements are unlikely to feature strongly in the psychological contract of long-term and

committed volunteers. Consistent with this assertion, the volunteers in this study evidenced few traditional transactional characteristics. Using the conclusions provided by previous studies in the literature, it was anticipated that transactional characteristics would be more common in new volunteers who are yet to develop strong relational bonds with the organisation, but this also was found not to be the case and little difference was identified between the new and more established volunteers. Those that were evidenced are discussed in this section.

#### *7.1.1.1 Attitude to Reward*

Transactional aspects of the psychological contract are normally associated with financial reward. When this concept is applied to a volunteering context, however, this is clearly not appropriate. Therefore, often other kinds of rewards available to volunteers, such as free or reduced entry to historic grounds or buildings for heritage volunteers, for example. Within RDA, this is different. Participants who spoke about their attitude to reward were unanimous that they do not expect to be tangibly rewarded for their volunteering. Several people spoke of the reward in a similar way to EK:

*“Just doing it. You’ve only to have some kiddie smile at you and that’s enough for me”* (EK).

There is a very real sense from the interviewees that they find the concept of ‘reward’ to be anathema to their volunteering selves:

*“I’m doing it because I want to. I’m not doing it for any thanks or anything, and we’re all doing it because we like it and you know, it’s just what you do and you get on with it. You don’t expect, you know, anything back really’.* (KK)

However, they all spoke of the acknowledgement and appreciation of others’ efforts as being important to a positive volunteer experience. Many of the people interviewed have management roles within RDA and therefore felt justified in assessing the way ‘their’ volunteers were treated – but somehow did not expect the same treatment to be extended to themselves. MC, when talking about the offer of London 2012 Paralympic tickets to RDA

volunteers (these were usually given as reward for something, decided by Groups or Regions), told the story of a volunteer who stayed up all night working on a project with a tight completion deadline to help my interviewee, said

*“So she deserves something, I probably don’t but I’m going anyway”* (MC).

In this case, both interviewee and volunteer were using the tickets, but there was a palpable sense of guilt from the interviewee that she ‘didn’t deserve’ the reward. Many spoke of reward more generically: a genuine ‘thank you’ from a participant, a letter of thanks from outside their normal circle of acquaintances (especially from National Office), or in a couple of cases, a bunch of flowers. In every case, the ‘reward’ was seen as being exceptionally nice and very welcome:

*“It was lovely, really spontaneous and really appreciated, you know so that sort of thing does much good, I think”* (IH).

RDA does give recognition awards to its volunteers:

- for long service at 10, 25 and 40 years’ service;
- an ‘Over and Above’ award, given to volunteers who are seen to do something outside their normal commitments;
- the President’s Award, presented by HRH The Princess Royal (President of RDA) for notable achievement or service and sometimes given to long-standing volunteers as a mark of distinction and respect;
- Groups and Regions often have their own awards which recognise service at that level.

These awards were mentioned by several interviewees – it really matters that ‘others’ are appreciated. However, there are many accounts of Groups being unwilling to ‘single out’ one volunteer over others for awards, expressing the view that:

*“All helpers are special so how do we pick one out above another?”*

therefore constraining the organisation’s efforts to appreciate their volunteers. This attitude is part of the culture of RDA as discussed in section 5.5.3.3 and it seems that once volunteers

are given an award, they will wear the badge with pride, but never would they solicit it for themselves. TT suggested that:

*“I think some of our older volunteers feel more of a need to be appreciated and to be told how well they’ve done and what a lot of commitment they’ve given .... it is mainly the people who have been involved for a long time (who) really need to be remembered and encouraged to still feel part of it”*

The reference to ‘older’ volunteers here may demonstrate an awareness that volunteers have different needs at different stages in their ‘life cycle’ (Bussell & Forbes, 2005). The implication is that as volunteers spend time in RDA – ‘older’ referring to both age and service in this context – they expect different things from the people around them to those volunteers who are more recently engaged. This might suggest that the psychological contract is expected to change over time, from the expectation that they will not receive ‘anything’ to a requirement for appreciation from their peers, at least. As discussed in Chapters Three and Six, this ‘change’ in the psychological contract has not been proven in the literature and, as such, forms an interesting area for further work. As in the extant literature, within this study, there is insufficient evidence to draw firm conclusions on the likelihood of change over time. However, based on the interviews conducted for this study, anecdotal evidence suggests that the volunteers’ expectation of reward becomes greater as they are with the organisation longer.

#### *7.1.1.2 Support from RDA*

The volunteers talked about RDA in a variety of ways. For most, RDA is what they ‘do’ at their Group: the regular riding and driving participation sessions where they get their social interaction, the buzz of helping others or their regular ‘fix’ of horses. However, when they become holders of positions of responsibility, another ‘RDA’ emerges in their discussions. This is the ‘Headquarters’ RDA – more correctly known as National Office. As shown in section 6.1, volunteers are more aware of National Office once they occupy a more senior role. For the regular volunteer, Group is where they get their experience of RDA, build their

network and do their learning; hence this is the basis on which they build their psychological contract.

Based in Warwick, with a small paid staff, National Office is the 'hub' of RDA; the regulatory and policy centre and the reporting structure for all County, Regional and National voluntary roles. It is therefore – rightly – not in the everyday line of sight for the majority of volunteers who operate only in their Groups, but it should loom fairly large in the consciousness of those volunteers who move up the ladder. Having been involved with National Office myself since 2004, I know that it tries to strike a balance between, on one hand, giving volunteers freedom to work through their issues in a consistent but independent way whilst, on the other, ensuring that service levels and guidance are of the highest quality. Sometimes this balance is difficult to achieve. The hierarchical nature of the organisation outside the Group means that the roles of County, Region and National volunteers are defined quite tightly and each has their reporting lines made very clear. The hierarchy of these roles is maintained quite strictly and is seen as important to the efficient functioning of the organisation. County tend to be the level closest to the Groups, County works closely with Regions and Regions talk to National. Many volunteers continue to remain involved with the Group whilst holding other roles simultaneously.

Some volunteers, especially those in more senior roles, talked of the need for an 'efficient' and 'approachable' support from National Office.

*"I expect to be given all the necessary information that I need to do my job and obviously to get the support when I need it and ask for it, which I've always had" (GT)*

*"I think the main reason why I stay with RDA is that I know if there is a problem, that I can pick up a phone and I can speak to [somebody] who will find someone to help with that particular problem and give me an answer" (KQ)*

*"National Office are fantastic with their support" (TN)*

In the majority of examples, participants in the study were positive with regard to the support they receive, whoever they look to for support. The only negative comments came from those participants who are situated in the further reaches of the UK: the lack of visits



and regular contact especially from National Office was felt strongly by these volunteers who questioned whether they 'mattered' as much as those in central England.

Overall, volunteers expressed satisfaction with the organisational support they receive. It is a small but important part of their psychological contract, making the rest of the activity possible through facilitation of the wider organisational agenda.

#### *7.1.1.3 Training*

Volunteers are unequivocal that differing roles require different forms of training. Those who are Instructors were definite that formal training was an essential element of their experience at RDA; it is therefore evident that it forms a central part of their transactional psychological contract.

Riding, or indeed any contact with horses, inherently carries a degree of risk of injury. Where contact also involves people with disabilities, that risk is elevated. RDA is risk averse by nature and the culture embedded in groups and individuals is to be always mindful of safe practice. Therefore, the expectation of training can easily be explained, and is certainly a central expectation of all volunteers, regardless of their level or role:

*"I would expect a certain amount of training" (TD)*

*"Yes, I think you do need training and you do need updating" (MD)*

*"Given the demands that are made on us as Instructors now, I do expect the training to come from National, for my level, in the same way that we provide training at Regional and County level for instructors within the Groups" (GT)*

*"If I was coming into this not having done it before, yes, yes you do need training, absolutely" (TC)*

This, then is an element which is seen as a non-negotiable obligation on the part of the volunteer; it is not something that is 'nice to have' but is essential to volunteers being able to perform their roles. In that sense, it forms a basic level to the psychological contract and can therefore be categorised as part of the 'transaction' of volunteering.

#### 7.1.1.4 Identifying transactional elements

All volunteers, regardless of role, experience, motivation, time as a volunteer or any other factor, steadfastly refused to identify any factor which they considered as 'reward' or incentive to volunteer. As shown in section 7.1.1, however, there is clear evidence that transactional aspects do exist, although not immediately obviously in the sense of the literature definition of 'specific exchanges, of narrow scope, which take place over a finite period' as suggested by Robinson et al. (1994). Rather, the transactional exchange in this voluntary context is that of enabling support, which is provided by the parent organisation, and empowers volunteers to conduct their role. The volunteers see this support as a duty of the organisation; indeed the factors included here can be suggested to be *legally* and *morally* necessary for the activity to take place. In that sense, these are 'specific exchanges of narrow scope' which have value to both parties. Volunteers have a clear expectation that training will be provided to them to enable them to do their role; on this basis it obviously fits in the 'transactional' category. This applies to all volunteers, regardless of role, and is central to the culture of the organisation.

Other aspects of the transactional elements are not so distinct and easily identifiable, however. Section 7.1.1.1 demonstrates that these volunteers understand the role of reward and appreciation in maintaining the commitment and morale of other volunteers. Thus, for 'other volunteers', reward is seen as very important and can therefore be categorised as a transaction in the psychological contract, although with important caveats, as will be discussed below in section 7.2.

For the volunteer themselves, it could be argued that – should they become aware of any reward transactions – they may possibly see this provision as a violation of their own psychological contract. Many interviewees vehemently denied wanting any reward for their

activity for themselves (but see section 7.1.1.1 for their views on rewarding others). There were many examples of such attitudes throughout the dataset:

*"I don't expect anything. Really I don't expect anything. Is that the wrong answer?" (KK)*

*"I don't expect anything from it. Should I?" (MC)*

*No, no, I don't expect anything back from RDA one bit. No I wouldn't come here thinking what can I gain out of it? No that wouldn't be, I wouldn't like that at all." (SI)*

*"Nothing, you know, no nothing." (TN)*

Many volunteers guiltily reported gaining a 'feel good' factor from volunteering. It appears that there is a perception that altruism – the act of helping others for their benefit rather than one's own – should not be enjoyable. Therefore, to actually *enjoy* your volunteering is perceived to be wrong and not to be admitted publicly. MC enthused about her experiences with RDA:

*"I get a great buzz out of doing it and I love the people and the horses and the riders"*

Later on in the interview, however, she reiterates this point, but this time with a caveat:

*"I have an embarrassment to say it, but I do get a feel good factor from doing it".*

The inherent benefits of volunteering which keep people returning to RDA in spite of the challenges, cold and difficult physical conditions often encountered, cannot be explained in the light of psychological contract theory alone. The concept of a 'reverse contract', where the absence of a trait is considered a positive virtue, as is the case with reward, above, has not been discussed anywhere else. Whilst not impossible, it is extremely unlikely to be consistently found in a heterogeneous group such as those in this study. Accepting that the consistency of data generated by this study is correct, there has to be another factor at work to create such conditions for volunteers. It is proposed in this thesis that the framework of serious leisure – in this case, serious leisure volunteering – is that factor. The interrelationship between the psychological contract and serious leisure status will be explored in Chapter Eight.

#### 7.1.1.5 *The contribution of the volunteer*

The discussion above demonstrates that volunteers are very clear about the content of the transactional elements that they receive as part of the psychological contract. When it comes to what volunteers expect to *give*, they are also equally clear and unanimous:

*“Loyalty, commitment and to be able to impart the fun and pleasure I’ve had throughout my life being involved with horses and to be able to improve lives” (DC)*

*“My interest, my time and now my experience” (DT)*

*“My time and expertise” (GT), (MN), (IC)*

*“Experience now, in all sorts of aspects. Encouragement” (IH)*

*“Oh, time, effort, what expertise I have in various fields” (FE)*

*“Time, experience, knowledge, warmth, encouragement, appreciation of others and what they are doing” (TT)*

By separating the two sides of the psychological contract explicitly into ‘What I Give’ and ‘What I Receive’ – it is possible to understand more of the factors which influence the volunteers.

It is suggested here that time, expertise and loyalty, whilst often cited as factors more likely to appear as ‘relational’ in an employment context in fact actually constitute a ‘transaction’ in the minds of these volunteers. These are the things that might otherwise have a pecuniary value and that form the backbone of their activity with RDA. It could even be implied that there is a ‘shift left’ of categorisations of content of the psychological contract for these volunteers (see Figure 7.1 below). In this case, factors that would be considered ‘relational’ in an employee’s psychological contract become more basic and transactional for RDA; this can only be explained by volunteers’ obvious affective commitment to the organisation (Shore & Tetrick, 2006).

#### 7.1.2 *Relational Aspects*

Relational aspects of the psychological contract are understood as being the identifying traits of longer-term employment relationships and those which are quality-driven rather than

related to quantity. These are discussed in the literature as being the features which create a commitment to the organisation through social links and expectations. The evidence from interviews showed that these feature very strongly in the psychological contracts of RDA volunteers. The structure of these relational aspects are explored in this section, which discusses identity, social class, friendship and fun.

#### 7.1.2.1 Identity

It is widely held within the organisation that RDA becomes 'who you are'; there are many examples in groups of people who don't 'do' RDA but 'saw themselves as' RDA. As discussed in section 5.2.6, much of the evidence for the organisational identity of volunteers is indirect and can be said to be intangible. Reflecting on the significance of their volunteering as part of their overall life balance, DD suggested that

*"for a lot of people ... it's their life."*

Concurring, IH said that RDA

*"provides a structure to my life, [is] a huge part of my life",*

KQ, when discussing the value of role descriptors, talked of the importance of flexibility – which demonstrates another aspect of how volunteers see themselves and develop their identity as volunteers:

*"this is why this organisation works so well because people are always so flexible about what they do ... "oh, I can't do that because I haven't got my Regional hat on" – it doesn't work"*

This revisits the 'we're all in it together' (KK) approach of so many of my interviewees; as MD said,

*"some of the instructors only like instructing you know they don't really ... [want to do anything else] ... but I'm quite happy to, you know, pick out feet, lead horses as well ..."*

With this quote, we start to see volunteers differentiating themselves by their attitude to RDA: those who are 'serious' about their volunteering see themselves as more committed,

more flexible, more 'in tune' with RDA than their peers who perhaps don't quite meet the exacting standards required of those who are truly 'part' of RDA. TT reflected:

*"I think as a volunteer, if you see something needs doing, well you get on and do it, you don't go back and think 'oh – is this within my remit, should I be doing this or shouldn't I?' If something within RDA needs doing we'll do it, you know whether it's under your hat or someone else's hat you're there to help so you do it."*

She also talked about the part that RDA has played in her life:

*"... when I was seven I started riding and here I am all these years later still riding and still involved with, and putting back into the you know, into the activity [RDA]. I'm not sure there are many things you could say that ... I've remarried, I've moved areas and RDA has continued with me ... when I moved area I was still in the same region but then I had a chance to become involved with another county where I hadn't been involved with the one before, and there's the region, so then, still involved with the previous region, you know where I was living and ...it's come with me. ... Through all the ups and downs, dramas and excitements that life brings, RDA has actually been there for so much of my adult life from young right up to now ..."*

So we see their 'identity' forming part of volunteers' expectations: the 'committed' volunteer understands the 'deal' to include doing whatever is needed to make the session or activity work – the trade-off being that they get company and stability from the organisation as they go through life – forming a career in the organisation as they do so. This is particularly interesting when RDA has been through so much change since 1999; the majority of the volunteers interviewed had been volunteering since before that time so have had to adapt to new structures and 'rules', but the fundamental premise of the 'deal' does not seem to have changed. For them, it can be said that once an RDA volunteer; always an RDA volunteer'.

Coleman (2002) suggests that once a volunteer goes beyond a certain degree of involvement, their identity becomes bound up with the organisation's identity. Cuskelly et al. (2002) also discuss this tendency and conclude that volunteers motivations to start volunteering may be different to their motivations to continue volunteering, thus making the picture quite complex to analyse. Coleman continues, however, that volunteers who commit to the organisation are far less likely to leave the role or to question the level of work required and may become willing to shoulder significant responsibility for the organisation.

This clearly reflects some impact on the psychological contract of such people and appears to be the case for volunteers within RDA. This will be discussed further in section 8.3.

#### *7.1.2.2 Social Class and understanding the PC*

Dick and Nadin (2011) suggest that the value of the psychological contract is limited by the class of people in the study. Where respondents are not of a social class to be educated enough to appreciate the limits of their own reality and have belief in their ability to change their situation, they will not have the vision to create anything more than a very basic transactional psychological contract. If the ability of respondents to analyse and objectify their situations (following Bourdieu, 2000) governs their ability to form psychological contracts, then it is implied that the psychological contract really only exists for those who 'fit' the organisation and have the level of social belonging, as well as communication skills and ability to recognise and express it. Thus, minimum wage jobs performed by workers with low education levels and poor social expectations – as explored in Dick and Nadin's paper – are, it is suggested, destined to always only demonstrate transactional contracts. This has implications for volunteers in RDA: the traditional educated 'white, middle-class' volunteers are much more likely to be able to form and express coherent psychological contracts which encompass complex concepts such as ideological beliefs (and therefore promulgate the existing culture within the organisation) than more inclusive, diverse categories of volunteers – participants, employee volunteers, younger volunteers. If this is the case, then it is almost inevitable that the 'traditional' volunteer who stays longest will be the one who fills senior roles. However, this study suggests that 'social inequalities' are explicitly and intentionally *not* reproduced within RDA. Indeed, evidence in this study demonstrates that these structural signals are routinely and intentionally disregarded by those with existing cultural capital, allowing volunteers without such advantages to grow and become more

integrated in the organisation. This attitude of encouraging equality is demonstrated by KQ, talking about the arrival of a new volunteer:

*“this volunteer came in, and she wandered in with the group and the physiotherapist said ‘I’ve got a mother who’s coming’ and I looked up and this rocker chick came in ... (laughter) .. Leather jacket and she had these tight jeans on and her legs were, well, she looked like a sparrow. These legs with these huge bovver boots at the bottom and bits of metal everywhere and she had this blank look on her face... I worked with her for four years and when she finally said ‘sorry I can’t come anymore because I’ve got a job – a management job’. She said ‘thank you, you must have wondered what you were getting’. Well, I thought yeah, she was the anorexic, single mother. She had had to pack up everything in London, she had had this child with special needs, she had had to come back into the home area, wasn’t really supported by her family and her life was just hell, and every Monday she came to do RDA and was appreciated. I think that was the main thing, she was appreciated. She was told that she was really good at doing this, and gradually you saw her start to change. She put weight on, she started to smile, suddenly she had life in her eyes and – as I say – at the end of four years she was able to go out, go for an interview and she got a management job. I was so pleased, and that’s what RDA does.”*

Development of the whole person – whether volunteer, parent or participant – is part of the expectation of RDA activity. Equally important, as KQ continued, is equal treatment of everyone:

*“I’ve worked in organisation where people, where the organisation looks at the person’s stature, how they dress, if a man has a ponytail they take exception to that, they make judgements on people. I find in RDA that doesn’t happen ... they have only to be willing to come and work with the ponies and people with disabilities. They could be a multi-millionaire or they could be someone who has no money at all and lives hand to mouth every single day, but as long as they give their heart to what they’re doing ... I have seen no one actually turn against someone because they don’t fit into the group”.*

The value of ‘equality’ might be argued to fit into the category of ‘ideology’ as a value of the organisation. In this case, however, it is included as a relational aspect because it was represented in the interviews for this study as an important factor in building relationships with the people who make up RDA rather than something that was believed in as a value. Equality seems to be something volunteers ‘do’; it is an active decision rather than something they ‘are’. Historically many volunteers for RDA were ‘female, white, middle class and middle aged’; that is no longer the case. Interestingly, it is these original volunteers who have driven that change through the organisation by a deliberate policy of inclusiveness, probably reflecting the ideology of the organisation (as discussed below in section 7.1.3.1).



### 7.1.2.3 Friendship and social links

Equally important to the decision to *stay* as a volunteer are the social links and friendships which develop during the act of volunteering. This is similar to findings in other long-term volunteer studies within the literature, based on Blau's (1964) social exchange theory and is an important consideration for managers of volunteers.

*"it's really nice people, I love the people" (MC)*

*"I meet some really nice people, some very inspiring people ..." (GT)*

*"it's a good chance to meet people" (GX)*

*"the longer you do it the more people you know, therefore the more they come to trust you, to talk to you and to share things with you and the better you can do the role really, I think" (TT)*

It has already been established in sections 5.2.5, 5.4 and 5.8 that volunteers gain a great deal out of the familial culture and social networks established within RDA, so it is not unexpected that the 'relational' aspect of the psychological contract emerges as being very strong. Volunteers cite friendship and support (of each other as opposed to support from National Office) as being important to them:

*"It was really good fun and they were wonderful people and very appreciative, all of them" (DC)*

*"... the family feel, we're all in it together, we're all in it to help disabled people I would hope, but to give them a lot of fun and enjoyment, which is the most important thing really" (EK)*

*"I was welcomed; they said yes we'd love to have you" (GT)*

*"... then you get to know everyone else, because people who volunteer are generally nice people ... so everyone is really family ... I haven't met anyone nasty yet!" (GX)*

*"I've never seen any animosity or anything like that at all. Everyone seems to get on terribly well; everyone seems terribly cheerful, which is lovely really" (SI)*

*"It's meeting people, the friendship" (TT)*

*"... They're a really friendly bunch" (XU)*

*"Well, I've seen that everyone seems to be really happy and it's a real team atmosphere and I think that sense of belonging ... will be what I get back from it." (XU)*

### 7.1.2.4 Fun

Fun comes out as a key theme too – from a 'managerial' perspective, as discussed by more senior volunteers. In this context, "fun" is enjoying oneself in the activity rather than being separate to 'the job' as it was defined by Karl et al. (2005). For RDA, fun is necessary to deal

with some of the more challenging aspects of the activity. It is a mindset which allows the introduction of humour, relationship building and shared stories to ensure that everyone involved enjoys themselves:

*“It’s about RDA, the whole ethos, about the three cycles of riding, therapy and fun, and it’s always got to have the fun, whatever you are doing you’ve got to have that element, because if you don’t it’s not just that you won’t keep the riders, you won’t keep the volunteers and you don’t keep the instructors. It’s the fact that everyone has fun ...” (KQ)*

The introduction of games, challenges and humour into the day to day activity allows volunteers, riders and instructors to express themselves. As DC and EK explained, it is vital that everyone remains involved to get the best out of the activities:

*“It can be mind-numbing if you’ve got a very basic rider ... [bright voice] ‘oh Johnny, that’s a jaunty little angle; I should sit up a bit if I were you!’ and you get the volunteers laughing ...” (DC)*  
*“We’re all in it to help disabled people I would hope, to give them a lot of fun and enjoyment” (EK)*

The combination of sport and therapy as occurs in RDA is an unusual one and therefore this need to make activities fun has to date not been commonly considered in literature elsewhere. That said, no sport club exists without an element of fun in the training sessions and fun is widely researched in the fields of sport participation, coaching and education (Jackson, 2000; Petlichkoff, 2010; MacPhail et al., 2008).

It was anticipated at the outset of this study that the relational aspects of the psychological contract would be of utmost importance to the volunteers participating, and the sections above demonstrate that this is the case. Each aspect provides reasons for the volunteers to deepen their commitment to the organisation and each other. This reinforces their cultural and social bonds and provides continuing incentive to stay involved.

### 7.1.3 Ideological elements

The Collins Dictionary defines ideology as ‘the set of beliefs by which a group or society orders reality so as to render it intelligible’. If this definition is applied to the psychological contract, this means recognising that the norms and values of the organisation have an effect

on the way that psychological contract is formed and worked out in practice. Work on the ideological aspect of the psychological contract is recent (Thompson & Bunderson, 2003; Vantilborgh et al., 2014; Bal & Vink, 2011), and challenges much of the prevailing management theory. If it is established that ideological aspects of the psychological contract do actually exist, they would be appealing to the manager as they suggest a way of gaining an employee's commitment and buy-in to the organisation with no tangible outlay. On the flip side of this, is the possibility that the psychological contract becomes breached without the organisation knowing about it. In terms of a volunteer's experience, confirming the existence of ideological aspects of the psychological contract explains the bond a volunteer has to their volunteering and increases the likelihood that the volunteer will remain with the organisation.

#### *7.1.3.1 Acceptance and Improving lives*

There appears to be a very clear set of values and beliefs shared by all volunteers in RDA. These revolve around RDA's strapline "improving lives" and also embody helping others to progress, enjoy life more and to make a difference:

*"... when somebody who is really severely disabled just holds their head up once or someone with learning difficulties looks you in the eye for the first time, that's important to me" (EK)*

*"I like to be with RDA. I think it does a lot of good for riders" (EX)*

*"If you don't really care then there's no point in your really being here" (GX)*

*"I always say that our charity isn't going to save lives but it perhaps improves the quality of life" (TD)*

*"What I get back is the thrill of seeing someone achieve. The thrill of seeing someone's self-esteem being increased, that's what I want to get back from working with the children we work with" (IC)*

*"... The joy at seeing the difference you can make ..." (KO)*

*"I think this organisation has a greater understanding that people have personal problems. So I've seen, I've worked in organisations where people, where the organisation looks at the person's stature, how they dress, if a man has a ponytail they take exception to that, they make judgments on people. I find in RDA that doesn't happen ... they only have to do one thing which is actually be willing to come and work with ponies and people with disabilities ... as long as they give their heart to what they are doing" (KQ)*

*"The participant is the key person, that's why we're all there ... you want to maximise their potential as much as you possibly can so we're facilitators of that I suppose. As volunteers, we would be facilitating the riders to reach their goals." (KK)*

*"I think it's offering [the riders] the ability to be in a totally new environment and it allows*

*them to be free. I look on it as being able to offer these people the opportunity to do things they wouldn't normally be able to do and I believe it expands them, being able to come riding, and I think of it in that way" (TC)*

Increasingly, the literature (Thompson & Bunderson, 2003; Vantilborgh et al., 2014) suggests that a strong ideological component to a volunteer's psychological contract will make the difference that results in a volunteer staying with the organisation in spite of factors which would normally trigger a breach or violation of the psychological contract.

#### *7.1.3.2 Imbalance in the psychological contract*

There is evidence of the importance of ideology in the data generated by this study – one interviewee, a very long-term volunteer who had many years' experience of running groups and working with National Office began to cry as she told me how she didn't feel she was getting the support she needed from National Office (a 'transactional' factor). On deeper exploration it became clear that the pain she was feeling was due to a history of feeling unsupported and 'ignored' (her group and region are on the periphery of the UK and therefore geographically distant from most activity organised by RDA). This feeling of support forms part of the ideological basis of inclusion and caring so important in the psychological contracts of these volunteers (see 4.7). We talked about the problems off-tape for a long time, and, whilst it was clear that there was considerable hurt which may have led to her 'walking away', she would not do this because it would remove the chance for her riders to receive the benefit they get from riding, thus challenging her understanding of the balance of the ideological aspects of her psychological contract. She told me, "I bother to turn out three times a week because it gives them [the riders] pleasure ... so for my riders I will do it." The ideological aspect of her psychological contract was strong enough to override the many perceived breaches she experienced. As discussed by Vantilborgh et al. (2014), the underfulfilment of this aspect of the psychological contract caused an increase in her work effort in an attempt to 'rebalance' the relationship and restore it to an acceptable level. However, Vantilborgh et al. (2014) continue:

*“It is likely that if the ideological PC underfulfilment becomes too large or is prolonged for an extended period of time, and thus crosses boundaries of what can be tolerated, volunteers may decide to revise their PC or to leave the exchange agreement altogether (Schalk & Roe, 2007).”*

In this case, it is demonstrated that the volunteer has no intention of leaving the agreement. Rather, she accepts an unbalanced psychological contract as the price of the work she feels she needs to do. This example was very clearly expressed but was not the only one and this was a common reaction amongst the participants in this study, demonstrating the overriding importance of ideology as an aspect of the psychological contract in RDA. It can therefore be suggested that the psychological contract of these volunteers is profoundly imbalanced, but that this is accepted as a normal position. Freese and Schalk (2008) suggest that

*“because of the psychological nature of the contract, the evaluation of the psychological contract needs to be established directly by the respondent and not by a researcher. For example, a difference between a perceived promise and the actual level of inducements of -1 could be considered by a researcher as an imbalance. In certain cases, however, an employee could not perceive this as an imbalance. For example, because the discrepancy is rather small, or the person has a low equity sensitivity, or the obligation is not important, or because there is only one imbalance in the psychological contract. In other cases a small imbalance might be the last drop that makes the ‘cup run over’. The evaluation of whether there is a violation of the psychological contract therefore needs to be indicated by the respondent.”*

With their view in mind, this work has established that an ‘imbalanced’ psychological contract may look very strange to the outsider but that it has currency to the volunteers in RDA and, indeed, appears to be considered to be ‘correct’ by the volunteers. It appears that the culture and values embedded within the organisation and forming the ideological basis of part of the psychological contract are fundamental in maintaining the commitment of volunteers, in spite of such imbalance, regardless of whether it is perceived or real.

#### *7.1.3.3 Organisational Culture*

This study has demonstrated that the psychological contract is embedded within the organisation’s culture: the immediate socialization of new volunteers instills the basics of the culture, a deeper understanding will come with time. The psychological contract held

by volunteers has been shown to be culture-specific and it may develop as volunteers become more embedded. It has also been shown that the psychological contract is conceptualized in the group, as suggested by Alvesson (2002:3-4): the culture is so strong that it appears the volunteers maintain a collective PC, which is shared by all groups but not controlled by National Office. This 'group-based' psychological contract remains even when volunteers move away from a specific group role, as in County and Regional officials. We can therefore argue that organisational culture is critical to developing the psychological contract in volunteers because the dynamic of the group reflects the values of the organisation and therefore informs the development of the collective or 'group-based' contract. The psychological contract thus becomes a mechanism which reproduces and sustains the culture of the organisation.

## 7.2 Mapping the content of the psychological contract in RDA

The data presented and evaluated in Chapter Six and section 7.1 above create an understanding of the factors which are important to volunteers in RDA. Analysis has also shown that volunteers are able to hold concurrent psychological contracts for multiple roles without apparent conflict; it must be said, however, that these contracts differ only slightly according to role. Figures 7.1 and 7.2 represent diagrammatically the findings in section 7.1. They are separated into the two 'sides' of the volunteers psychological contract: what I receive and what I give. This is done to make the differences clearer – in practice no separation is discerned by the volunteer.

Each point in these representations is covered in section 7.1 and relates to one or more characteristics of the serious leisure framework, as also discussed in that section. There are considerable criticisms in the literature of *'attempts to fit what are, by definition, idiosyncratic reciprocal promises into content types, such as the transactional-relational*

*distinction'* (Conway & Briner, 2005:61). Nevertheless, the representations here are offered with the benefit gained from the additional influences discussed in Chapter Six which help to explain and shape the psychological contract. These 'contents' then, are not seen in isolation but rather as the culmination of the whole experience of the volunteer's journey through RDA. In this way, they offer a more holistic understanding of the volunteer than it might be possible to gain through content analysis alone.

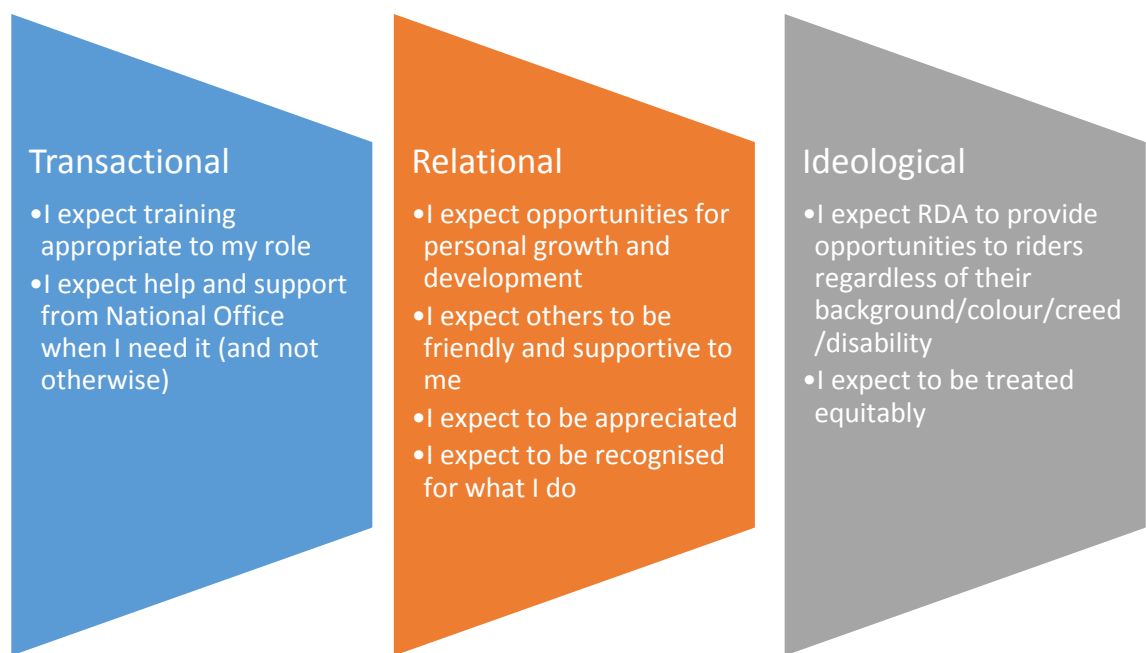
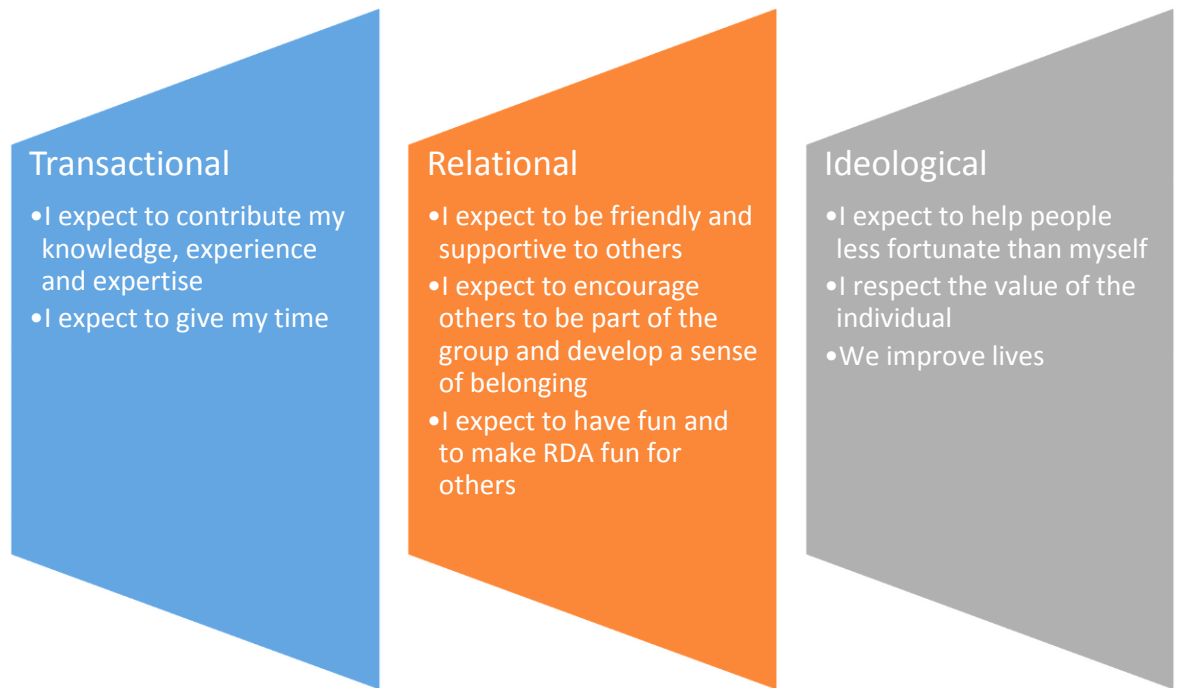


Figure 7.1: Content of PC in RDA Volunteers – What I receive



*Figure 7.2: Content of PC in RDA Volunteers – What I contribute*

Each of the blocks in Figures 7.1 and 7.2 can be seen to be related to the volunteer’s journey, depicted in Figure 5.2. The decision points discussed in section 5.5 of shared values, acceptance, acculturation, belonging and embeddedness influence the formation of the psychological contract and its similarity between many volunteers. Clearly, the boundaries between these blocks are not absolutely defined and there may be a little variation between one volunteer and another. In the majority of cases in this study, however, the positioning of each factor was very clear – as discussed above.

It will be noted that some factors which might be expected to be ‘relational’ in the employee are positioned as ‘transactional’ in this depiction. This was consistent throughout all interviews and can be explained predominantly by the influence of ideology on the psychological contract as a whole.



### 7.3 Outcomes

Given, therefore, that the psychological contract appears to be stable across volunteers, resilient to challenge and self-perpetuating amongst the group, there follow a number of likely outcomes which should be considered for these volunteers and the organisation within which they operate.

It is important to note at this point that this analysis is not intended to provide some sort of blueprint for managing volunteers. Far from creating a management tool, this study has sought to understand the content and process of formation of the psychological contract in order to better understand the volunteers themselves. This organisation, in common with many sport and third sector organisations, is volunteer-led. Whilst normal management practices are carried out by both paid staff and volunteers – although much more by volunteers than paid staff – the application of some ‘management implications’ as suggested by many writers (Sturges et al., 2005; King, 2000; Morrison & Robinson, 1997) would be inappropriate in this context. Instead, understanding how volunteers frame their own expectations as presented in section 7.2 and the dynamic nature of the psychological contract provides a clearer picture of how and why volunteers in RDA do what they do.

### 7.4 Breach & Violation of the Psychological Contract

Breach and violations of the psychological contract were not the focus of this study. However, they are central to Rousseau’s contributions to the psychological contract literature. In her terms, breach is created by unfulfilled promises on the part of one party – usually the employer, as the majority of work focuses on the psychological contract of the employee. Breach usually results in the actual contract being broken: that is, the termination of the relationship under consideration. Violation, on the other hand, is also damage to the relationship, but is of smaller magnitude and therefore results in ‘adjustment’ to the

psychological contract rather than breakage of the relationship. Breach and violation have been the subjects of the majority of work on the psychological contract since Rousseau's regeneration of the psychological contract debates, and especially in work on volunteers. Whilst they were not the main focus of this project, during interviews the area was covered for completeness of understanding. In general, the subjects of these interviews steadfastly refused to acknowledge breach or violation of their own psychological contract, whilst acknowledging that it might happen to other volunteers. By definition, the majority of those who have experienced 'breach' are probably no longer volunteering and therefore it may be unrealistic to expect to find evidence of it in this study. It would be expected though, to find examples of violation – especially in a body of people who have invested so heavily in their volunteering for as long as these have. Some of these examples have been explored above in section 7.1.3.2.

Violation of the psychological contract is clearly present in the experience of RDA volunteers. There are a number of themes which cause reported violation, but they all distil to one factor: *when the individual is not valued, violation ensues*. In an organisation where the culture so specifically values the individual and cherishes acceptance of difference, this should not be surprising. We can therefore see violation resulting from behaviour which is, or is perceived to be, counter to the accepted cultural mores of the organisation. Additionally, it is argued (following Vantilborgh et al., 2012) that the presence of a strong ideological aspect to the psychological contract provides 'insulation' against breach and reduces the volunteer's sensitivity to violation, thus making the psychological contract more resilient than it would be without the ideological content. It was, however, unexpected that so many interviewees would deny so vehemently that they had *ever* experienced violation of their psychological contract. Perhaps this reflects their stalwart status in the organisation; perhaps it is a badge of honour that one 'puts up' with the challenges and doesn't complain – an attitude which *may* be explained in part by the demographic of the volunteers, although

there was a wide cross section of demographic in the interviewees and the attitude was common to all. Organisational culture and commitment to the role (as found in the framework of serious leisure) regardless of personal cost is therefore a more plausible explanation.

Not utilising volunteers effectively was the most commonly cited cause of potential violation:

*“if we don’t utilise the skills that people bring with them here, we run the risk of them feeling that maybe we are patronising them or they are not being used properly” (CD)*  
*“if you look around and you see people just standing around doing nothing, then you run the risk of them feeling they’re not needed and they’re not valued; I think sometimes if we don’t use people as much as they want to be used, that’s a real danger zone” (CD)*  
*“the last thing we want to do is have a volunteer turn up and we don’t have role for them” (TD)*  
*“if you have too many and you’re not using them they then get disillusioned” (KO)*  
*“I hate being there and not having a job ... if you volunteer, you’ve set aside the time and you get there and you’re standing around because ... you haven’t got anything to do, that is very irritating because everybody’s busy and you feel unwanted” (MC)*  
*“... you do go away feeling well I could have used my time better” (MD)*

Reflecting the culture and values of the organisation, other examples of violation were cited when people feel they are not listened to or their expertise is not appreciated:

*“that’s what is so good about the organisation, each is treated as an individual. I think if we lose that, then I think we’d lose a lot of volunteers ... [talking about younger, ‘career-oriented’ instructors] They’re not really intensely understanding each person as an individual, each disability as an individual and so on” (KQ)*  
*“... but they [National Office] listened to the volunteers ... I would hate to see that they stop listening. Yeah, I’d hate to see that, I think I’d walk if they stopped listening” (KQ)*

The third theme was when people are not thanked or appreciated – although this apparently only applies to ‘other’ volunteers; interviewees came closer to citing incidents of violation when recounting their personal experiences of *being shown appreciation* than not being shown appreciation. This theme of being appreciated also covers treating people as individuals. As EK puts it,

*“well, I think if you never talk to them, or if they are doing this job and they never get a thank you, [they will be unhappy] for a start, because it’s important you thank them. Or if they have got something to say or they are worried about something and you dismiss it, I mean that’s not how you should treat volunteers”*

These senior volunteers are quite clear that each individual within RDA has 'rights': the right to be heard and listened to, to be valued for their skills and/or expertise and to have the time that is offered acknowledged and utilised. They are confident that when these 'rights' are not observed, the volunteer may feel that their psychological contract has been violated. These factors mirror exactly the content the interviewees cite for their own psychological contract. Given the magnitude of the examples cited by some participants, it is surprising that breach is not more common – emphasising again the importance of ideology in the formation and continuation of the psychological contract of these volunteers. The other factor which seems to contribute to the lack of acknowledgement of violation – rather than the lack of actual violation of the psychological contract – by volunteers is the value they place on their commitment to their service to RDA.

## 7.5 Conclusions

Whilst it is counterintuitive to try to unpick the content of something which appears to be inherently unknowable, the material presented in this chapter paints a clear picture of the expectations of volunteers and might be captured as in Figures 7.1 and 7.2. It should be noted that this study has specifically not focussed on factors leading to breach and violation of the psychological contract; the volunteers interviewed are actively engaged with RDA and it was considered that focus on positive factors would be more useful – as has been established, we are still learning what forms the content of the PC can take, and this chapter has demonstrated the elements of the content of the psychological contract for these volunteers. In that sense, it adds to the existing body of knowledge.

It has been shown in this chapter that the volunteers studied demonstrate a generally consistent content to their PC. There are some variations to the far left (transactional) of the representation for those who hold formal roles which require definable training, often with legal implications, such as Instructors but beyond these very specific roles, all

volunteers show similar characteristics to their PC regardless of their role, their time in the organisation, their age, socio-economic status or motivation for volunteering in the first instance. It is particularly interesting that volunteers were able to make clear distinctions between their PC in a formal role and their PC as a 'general volunteer'. It is therefore reasonable to suggest that individuals hold multiple PCs within the same organisation, depending on which role they are operating in at that time. This of course also has implications for questions raised in the literature regarding 'who is the psychological contract with?' Accepting that multiple PCs are in existence, we are forced to ask why there is so much homogeneity in the psychological contracts of a heterogeneous group. A plausible explanation from the evidence in this study is that organisational culture has a strong regulatory impact on the content of the psychological contract. The existence of the serious leisure framework within the organisation also creates similarity in expectations and attitudes which informs the psychological contract. The impact of serious leisure on the psychological contract will be explored in the next chapter.

## 8 – Combining The Frameworks: What Can We Learn?

As demonstrated in Chapters Six and Seven, the psychological contract is the culmination of the expectations the volunteer forms of the organisation. It is formed at least in part by social and structural signals from the environment. It is also influenced by their ideological attachments to the objectives of the organisation. The existence of a serious perspective to volunteering, as shown in Chapter Five, may reasonably also be expected to have an impact on the content and resilience of the psychological contract.

Psychological contract theory has a long history in common understanding and in the literature of organisational behaviour and management. As discussed in Chapter Two, the main proponent of the concept in modern studies has been Rousseau, who reinvigorated the work of Argyris, Schein and Levinson et al many years after their original works on the topic had passed almost into obscurity and popularised the ideas, in the academic press at least. Rousseau's work, and that which followed it, had an exclusively 'business' focus, with much investigation of MBA students and other potential high-flying professionals, or else with employees in specific roles who were easy to identify and work with. It can be suggested that the outcomes of Rousseau's work was therefore only intended to apply to an employed population, and that, in this context, no consideration was given in the development of her ideas to any other type of use. This explains some of the difficulty of fitting the body of theory stemming from Rousseau's work to the voluntary sector. However, it is further suggested that the evidence within this study points to a more fundamental issue with the work of Rousseau and those who follow her with regard to volunteers and their psychological contract: they understood the psychological contract to be an individual concept, which is made in isolation between the employee and the employer, with little or no consideration for the social conditions, constructs and environment in the formation of the psychological contract. Furthermore, Rousseau makes it clear that she sees the contract

as promissory and explicit, not as implicit or personal. The evidence of this study provides strong evidence that formative structural signals are created by people around the volunteers – both before their engagement with the organisation and during their tenure – and furthermore that these signals have significant effect on the content and resilience of the psychological contract. In this respect, it is necessary to look beyond the analysis of Rousseau to consider how and where theory explaining this type of psychological contract might be found. Previous work on Serious Leisure, has paid scant attention to the concept of the psychological contract to demonstrate the important links between the two concepts with any consistency. Only a small volume of work considers this link. (Chelladurai, 2006; Houlihan & Green, 2010; Lockstone-Binney, 2010; Nichols, 2013). This chapter explores the intersections between serious leisure and the psychological contract in order to enhance our understanding of these important determinants of a volunteers' behaviour.

### 8.1 Intentionality Expedites The Maturation Of The Psychological Contract

The existence of the psychological contract in volunteers has been established by several researchers (Pearce, 1993; Taylor et al., 2006; Nichols, 2009, 2012; Vantilborgh et al., 2011; Harman & Doherty, 2014; Vantilborgh, 2015), but there still exists a lack of understanding about how the psychological contract is actually formed in the first instance.

Considering the volunteers' route through RDA, as demonstrated by the participants in this study, there is a tendency amongst existing volunteers to try to 'tempt' new people in with small roles, lightweight time commitments and easy, sociable activities, essentially in the hope that they will 'become hooked' and move toward a deeper and longer-term commitment. Participants in this study who occupy formal, senior, roles confessed that they would not willingly convey to a new volunteer the whole of the activity they were involved in with RDA as *'no-one in their right mind would want to do all that!'* (DD). This acknowledgement that they have experienced 'role creep' – a slowly increasing commitment

to the organisation's activities – gives cause for concern at a number of levels, not least when considering strategies for retaining volunteers into the future, and eventually succession planning for senior roles. This approach of reducing the visible commitment so as not to frighten newcomers off is often informed by a mostly subconscious understanding of the concept of commitment and effort dedicated to volunteering that suggests it will grow stronger over time, just by the volunteer being involved with the organisation.

As with the concept of 'acculturation' discussed throughout Chapter Five but specifically in 5.5.3.3, volunteers are assumed by writers to grow a deeper attachment as they spend more time in RDA (Cuskelly, 2002). Although intuitively obvious, this approach appears to be, counter-intuitively, not borne out by many of the subjects interviewed for this study. The interview data suggest that 'becoming serious' is a decision a person actively makes rather than a process they go through without conscious awareness. The implication of this is that voluntary organisations may have to actively manage the recruitment of volunteers – and their journey through their volunteering career – with the issue of 'seriousness' in mind from early on.

Notably, Chapter Five showed, in contradiction to existing literature (Stebbins, 2007), that newer volunteers in RDA made a decision to be serious about their volunteering very soon after commencement or even, in one instance, before commencing to volunteer. It is suggested within this thesis that becoming a serious leisure volunteer is – for at least a sub-group of volunteers – a decision made consciously rather than a process of developing an interest, which might happen without a conscious tipping point. This decision, identified here as 'intentionality', has a demonstrated impact on the content and formation process of the psychological contract. By expediting their own assimilation and socialisation, the newer volunteers demonstrated that they had formed a psychological contract similar to that held by more established volunteers much more rapidly than would be expected or suggested by



previous studies (Baldwin & Norris, 1999; Gallant, Smale & Arai, 2010; McQuarrie & Jackson, 1996) – in only a few weeks in several cases. Volunteers who had been in RDA for many years discussed that they had taken time – in some cases months or years - to understand their role and form their psychological contract. Therefore, this indicates that newer volunteers exhibiting this characteristic of intentionality are quite different to volunteers who do not exhibit it and will require distinct treatment by the organisation, as will be discussed below.

The status of being a serious leisure volunteer implies an acceptance of the characteristics of the framework of serious leisure. These newer volunteers have therefore effectively made a commitment to the activity and anticipate being part of the organisation for the foreseeable future. They are, in a sense, using the characteristics of serious leisure as a framework for the formation of their psychological contract. This framework matches the psychological contract of the more established volunteers almost exactly because they, also, are serious leisure volunteers and the characteristics of serious leisure effectively define them too. The point of interest here is not that the content is similar across heterogeneous groups of volunteers but that the intention to be serious about their volunteering in effect ‘short-circuits’ the process of acculturation and socialisation and still comes up with the same answers in terms of content.

There are a number of implications of this process occurring within RDA which are explored below.

#### 8.1.1 The need for a structured introduction to the voluntary role

The existence of ‘intentionally serious’ volunteers challenges existing understandings of recruitment and retention of volunteers (Stebbins, 2007; Baldwin & Norris, 1999; Gallant, Smale & Arai, 2010; McQuarrie & Jackson, 1996; Nichols, 2013). Current understandings are based on an incremental approach of getting people into the organisation by tempting them

with small, easy to manage roles and slowly allowing them to become more integrated. Often, as demonstrated in the interviews for this study, this is the process by which longer-established volunteers have moved into RDA, in some cases taking years until they realised they were 'hooked'.

The data in this study suggest that some new volunteers are actively making the decision to be serious at a very early stage. This implies that they accept the need to persevere in spite of challenges, they expect to form a career within the voluntary organisation and they understand that significant effort will be required of them. Alongside this, they anticipate receiving benefits from volunteering, are happy to accept the shared practices and ideology of the organisation and want to build an identity linked to RDA. This being the case, an unstructured and casual approach to introducing roles is not going to fulfil them. Instead, they need to be given challenge and defined roles from the start with a clear trajectory for development as they continue with the organisation. The characteristics of serious leisure therefore form part of their psychological contract and if they are not fulfilled, there is an increased chance of breach or violation – as discussed in section 7.4.

### 8.1.2 Training

In order to create the conditions for the formation of a career through serious leisure volunteering, it is necessary for volunteers to receive structured and relevant training as discussed in the previous section. This has been shown in this study to form part of the transactional aspects of the psychological contract, indicating that it represents a basic requirement of the volunteer. The serious leisure volunteer will place more emphasis on training than a casual volunteer; where there is also intentionality at the outset of the volunteering, that emphasis is magnified. To ensure, therefore, that the volunteer does not feel a breach of their psychological contract, it is important that this is respected and that good, consistent training is provided for the volunteer. If this is not provided, there may be

a real risk of early breach of the psychological contract and the consequent loss of the volunteer to the organisation.

### 8.1.3 Succession planning

As well as demanding more from the organisation in terms of more structured management however, an increasing number of serious leisure volunteers provides a bigger pool of people who are likely to be available to take on more senior roles in the future. This is especially positive when a proportion of the volunteers are younger than the prevailing demographic in the organisation. This addresses an anxiety expressed by a number of interviewees in the study, when they explained their concern over not being able to find replacements for the roles they occupy. Rather than being frightened off by larger, more responsible roles, many serious leisure volunteers may welcome the opportunity to make a contribution in this way – providing they have been effectively challenged but not overfaced in their early experiences with RDA. Especially for volunteers such as SI and XU, who bring significant life experience with them to their volunteering, these opportunities may well be the next step as they seek to build their social network and give themselves a meaningful outlet in retirement. Such opportunities have always been available in organisations such as RDA; the intentionally serious leisure volunteer, however, demonstrates a requirement for opportunities for growth and development in a more formal way than has previously been established. Formal development schemes such as mentoring may be a way to capitalise on this trend without overstretching already busy volunteers, reflecting the approaches used by other large and structured voluntary organisations (Hede & Rentschler, 2007; Roberts, 1997).

### 8.1.4 Attitudes to younger volunteers

The data in this study uncovered contradictory attitudes toward younger volunteers in RDA. For some interviewees, ‘youngsters’ are to be welcomed, accepting the likelihood that they

may have extrinsic motivators for their activity (such as Duke of Edinburgh Awards) in the first instance but recognising also that they may well come back to RDA later in life. Establishing this pattern of engagement early on can therefore enhance the profile of the volunteer base in the future. For other interviewees, however, it was not possible to see past the extrinsic motivators. These volunteers did not recognise the potential of young people and only considered the cost they placed on the Group. Interestingly, the different attitudes displayed by the two sub-sets of more established volunteers was not attributable to any identifiable factor within this study. Attitudinal differences such as this may be fertile ground for further research given their impact on the volunteers around them and the effect the volunteers could have on the culture of the organisation.

In this study, GX – a Group volunteer – exhibited clear serious leisure tendencies in spite of beginning to volunteer for her Duke of Edinburgh Award. She did not have a family history of involvement with RDA, neither was she especially horsey. Her commitment to volunteering came from her experiences of being treated positively within the Group and gaining satisfaction from seeing the difference in the riders she dealt with. Recognising that she may have to cease volunteering with the Group in the near future as college loomed, she nonetheless was clear about her intent to return to RDA when life allowed.

Evidence gathered in this study supports the assertions frequently made in serious leisure literature that people who want to engage in serious leisure through their volunteering demonstrate significantly different expectations of such activity than those engaged in a more casual approach to their volunteering. It is possible, therefore, that an organisation might choose specific roles which require 'seriousness' and approach their management differently to those roles which benefit from, or allow, a more 'casual' approach. In the context of RDA, this would have a positive impact on the succession planning for key Group

roles and County, Regional or National roles, whilst allowing day-to-day roles within groups to emerge more organically.

This emphasis on the value of the intentionally serious leisure volunteer does not in any way detract from the value brought to the organisation by 'casual' volunteers; they are the lifeblood and the mainstay of the activities of many voluntary organisations, RDA being no different. It does, however, suggest that understanding the intentions and desires of new volunteers with regard to the impact they require the activity to have on the rest of their life balance would enhance the value the organisation can gain from the volunteer, and ensure that the volunteer has the best chance of getting from the activity that which they require.

More work is needed to establish how wide ranging the phenomenon of intentionality is in volunteers but the indications in this study are that it signals a notable change in the motivations of some new volunteers. This being the case, there is clearly a positive outcome for organisations embracing the intentional serious leisure volunteer, so long as they are managed appropriately, as indicated in 8.1.2 above.

## 8.2 Shared Psychological Contracts

The data gained in this study and discussed in Chapters Six and Seven clearly show that volunteers in RDA hold a strong and stable psychological contract. This is consistent with the ethos and values of the organisation, reflecting a strong ideological influence. In addition, it is demonstrably durable as well as being resistant to violation; this is suggested to be an outcome of the strength of the shared values and ethos of the volunteers in RDA. The establishment of such a strongly ideological psychological contract has – like much of the work coming out of this study – not been extensively considered in the literature. Where it has been considered (Taylor et al., 2006; Vantilborgh et al., 2012; O'Donohue & Nelson, 2007; Bal & Vink, 2011), the focus has been on the impact on the individual. Serious leisure theory is explicit that the shared ethos of the organisation is important to the participant's

experience of the activity. It is hypothesised here that the shared ethos created by a body of overwhelmingly serious leisure volunteers has the significant impact of influencing the development of the psychological contract which appears to exist within the organisation.

Considering the early work on the psychological contract, it was established in Chapter Two that early writers in the field all suggested that the psychological contract held by their subjects was formed as part of a group work agreement, with foremen who were formerly part of the work group. On this basis, it is suggested here that in order to understand the psychological contract of volunteers in this study it is necessary to understand them in the light of the early work more than the more recent work led by Rousseau. These volunteers clearly have a strong 'group attachment' to each other and their organisation and they take leadership from people who started in the Group and have worked their way up the organisational hierarchy; the people who are respected for understanding the challenges of working in the Group, who have the experience to deal with problems at that level as well as being able to intercede with higher-level managers (traditionally the role of the foreman).

The volunteers have a strong loyalty to each other, just as workers in the early studies did, and have valuable skills which are not easily assimilated or imitated. In all of these respects, volunteers closely resemble work groups, as defined by Argyris and Levinson et al. It is interesting that remuneration – beyond fair pay – was not a focus of early work on the psychological contract. This also presents a dissimilarity with literature written by Rousseau and following authors, whose approaches focussed exclusively on the employment relationship and the assumption that pay forms a central part of that relationship. It should be noted also that the elements of the psychological contract, as defined by Rousseau and those following, were heavily reliant on pay status and the permanence or casual status of the employment contract. In this sense, the work is bound to its' own era of industrial relations and heavily influenced by such. Clearly, these factors would not apply to volunteers

when considering their psychological contract, especially in the sport sector where many other factors as discussed previously are influential.

Schein, writing in the intervening period and bridging the gap between the early work and Rousseau's reimagining of the concept, framed the psychological contract as a factor in employee loyalty, commitment, enthusiasm for the organisation's goals and effective work performance (1988:99). These aspects of performance, loyalty and commitment can equally be seen in the volunteers in this study. Their psychological contract – which clearly incorporates both internal and external sources to form the content – appears, however, to be stable from the outset, rather than 'a dynamic one which must be constantly renegotiated' as Schein suggested (1988:24).

This study demonstrates that social cues, familial history and a strong organisational culture all contribute to the formation of a consistent psychological contract across a group of otherwise heterogeneous volunteers. The serious leisure framework provides a contemporary parallel in the voluntary realm for the formation of such groups. That notwithstanding, the possibility that a psychological contract might exist independently of the volunteers, but situated within the culture of an organisation, with those volunteers 'picking up' on it from others, is intriguing and takes the implicit nature of the concept even further than has previously been considered.

This study has demonstrated that the volunteers within RDA take their commitment very seriously and expect others to do the same, regardless of the level they volunteer at. It has been shown in 5.2.5 above that an important element of the psychological contract of volunteers in RDA is the strong values and culture of the organisation as formed by the body of volunteers. When considering the way volunteers are recruited and retained, the impact of values and culture within their psychological contract cannot be ignored. Rousseau (1995: 47ff) discussed the formation of a 'normative contract' between groups of employees:

groups holding common beliefs which form part of the culture of the organisation through a process of sharing and development. For Rousseau, this is “*part of developing a stable culture. People who share beliefs about the behaviours they are committed to demonstrate are in a sense doubly bound to those behaviours, both by their personal commitments as well as by social pressure to fit in and be accepted*”. In this sense, then, the normative contract explains the strong commitment, loyalty and tenacity of volunteers in RDA. They have, in effect, signed up to a set of shared behaviours, expectations and values which pre-existed them and will continue long after they are gone, regardless of organisational change. The conditions leading to the psychological contract demonstrated by the volunteers in this study, therefore, can be said to exist as an entity independent of the volunteers. Furthermore, they can be understood as the sum of years of experience, expectation, agreement and social more, and are clearly a very powerful determinant of behaviour.

### 8.3 Simultaneous Psychological Contracts

Many participants in this study hold multiple roles within RDA. For example, some were Group, County or Regional Chairman as well as Group, County or Regional Instructor, Volunteer Co-ordinator, Treasurer or Trustee. It has been shown in Chapter Seven that the content of the psychological contract is remarkably stable overall regardless of the role a volunteer holds; nevertheless the data gathered have also indicated that there are subtle differences within each psychological contract, in particular regarding who the ‘other party’ to the contract is considered to be.

It was demonstrated in section 6.1 that the parties to the psychological contract may be different for each role, which influences the content of that contract as well as its resilience. Section 6.4.2 discussed how such volunteers with multiple roles have demonstrated that they are capable of holding simultaneous psychological contracts. This study has demonstrated that they have one, overarching contract which contains ‘chapters’ within,



each chapter relating to a different role. This conceptualisation creates flexibility for the volunteer to relate to different parties in different ways, depending upon which 'hat' they are wearing at that point in time. In interview, many volunteers discussed this need for flexibility as a prerequisite for adequate performance as a serious leisure volunteer: KT, for example, indicated that she considered it normal that she would be helping groups through high level conflict one minute (a managerial role), assisting a rider the next (a Group helper role) and making tea for parents shortly afterward (a role often occupied by non-serious leisure volunteers). Each of these roles carries aspects of the psychological contract different to the other roles, but all fit together into the volunteers' 'book' that is their overall psychological contract.

This has been rarely explored in the literature to date. That which has been explored is in the employment context and focuses more on the importance of work groups than the content and parties to the psychological contract (Marks, 2001). This, however, is an issue which is likely to affect many community-, voluntary- and sport-based organisations, with their tendency to attract serious leisure volunteers and is therefore worthy of further research. The issue is of importance to the study of serious leisure volunteers because they are more likely to be in the position of having several roles by the nature of their commitment to the organisation. The implications of this finding is that there is increased capacity for the volunteer to feel that their psychological contract has been threatened where an inadvertent action by a party to one of the contracts acts in a way which contravenes another aspect of the contract held by that person for a different role.

#### 8.4 Negative Implications Of Serious Leisure Volunteering

Chapter Two addressed the critiques of serious leisure theory, one of which is identified as the lack of attention to the costs of participation in serious leisure, which has been discussed in a number of papers to date (Stebbins, 2005, 2007; Lamont & Kennelly, 2011; Baldwin &

Norris, 1999; Gallant, Arai & Smale, 2013). This study validates the findings of these papers by providing evidence of the costs of serious leisure volunteering, whether in the form of the opportunity cost of foregone activities, marital and familial disharmony or the need to reduce paid work to make time for the ever increasing demands of volunteering. Participants were open about the costs they faced due to their volunteering, in many cases exhibiting pride in the challenges they have overcome to continue with RDA – a clear sign of fulfilment of the first characteristic of serious leisure. Discussion uncovered a further angle to these costs, however, which is that serious leisure volunteers expect themselves and others to not only experience these challenges but also to overcome them, thereby demonstrating their commitment to RDA in the process. In this way, they expose an aspect of their psychological contract hitherto invisible and unconsidered: a ‘serious leisure’ volunteer should show commitment in spite of the cost. This stems in part also from the strong influence of organisational culture. Without evidence of commitment in this way, some interviewees suggested they would not consider someone serious. IH talked about her successor into the role of County Chairman, indicating the difference between the two of them:

*“... the role was much harder work when I was doing it. I mean, [she] hardly does anything, to be honest with you”*

This comment came in a wider discussion about inter-Group politics, the interviewee indicating that the successor had been less than successful in dealing with the problems created. In indicating that the role had been ‘downsized’, IH’s comments and body language clearly indicated that she considered the larger role to be correct and the challenges to be part of the role. Her psychological contract *for that role* therefore included some element of difficulty being overcome for the role to be successfully carried out. This would also preclude those challenges being considered cause for breach of the psychological contract, rendering it more resilient than it might otherwise be.

It is essential to distinguish between the expectation that commitment is shown in the face of challenge, and the expectation to appreciate, value and encourage others as a different characteristic of the psychological contract. Without an understanding of the impact of serious leisure on the psychological contract however, it would be much more difficult to pick out the former as a separate factor. Further work is needed to fully understand the principle, but the data from this study suggest that this phenomenon is specific to particular roles and therefore sits as one of the differentiating factors of a multi-faceted psychological contract, as discussed in section 8.3.

### 8.5 The role of societal change

Every interviewee in this study discussed the importance of their commitment to RDA. Each demonstrated the expectation that they would either remain 'doing' RDA or return to it in the future (see section 5.5.3.4). The integration of the Serious Leisure perspective to understanding the psychological contract of the volunteers in this study helps to explain why a commitment to RDA forms such an important part of their expectations. In a wider context, it also helps to develop our understanding of the role of social capital within voluntary organisations.

The data gathered by the current study very clearly demonstrates the importance of social capital to the volunteers. Putnam's (2000) work, which is heavily relied on by Stebbins in his discussions of Serious Leisure, posited that social capital was declining as people chose to follow fewer social pursuits in favour of individual activities. This, Putnam suggested, had led to a reduction in civic participation and political involvement. This is not a new idea; the Middletown Studies from the 1920s (discussed in Foley & Edwards, 1996) expressed similar concerns about the change in society's experiences of collective leisure action, blaming the development of radio for the increase in individualisation. It may be surmised that such concerns – while certainly not wholly unfounded – are an overstatement of the issue. This

can be evidenced by statistics showing increasing participation in sports clubs, voluntary organisations and other forms of collective action, as discussed in Chapter One. Whilst the latter may not show a direct link to democratic engagement, it is far more likely that where there is a collective conscience and social capital creation through activities such as long-term volunteering, democratic engagement is likely to follow. Stebbins (2007:71) discussed the importance of the 'culture of commitment' as part of the serious leisure experience. He does not make reference to the psychological contract in his work, but Nichols (2013), Chelladurai (2006), Houlihan and Green (2010) and Lockstone-Binney (2010) have all discussed it in the context of serious leisure volunteering. It remains, though, a significant step forward in our understanding of serious leisure volunteers to imply that the values they share form a central part of their psychological contract.

## 8.6 Applying Serious Leisure Characteristics to the Psychological Contract

The next section considers the linkages between the serious leisure framework and psychological contract theory by mapping the characteristics of serious leisure onto each of the three aspects of the psychological contract. This does not imply that there is an exact match but rather provides a basis on which analysis of the connections might be made.

### 8.6.1 Transactional aspects of the psychological contract

In terms of how these elements of the psychological contract fit with the framework of serious leisure, it is suggested that transactional elements of the psychological contract relate to both the '*need to persevere with the activity*' and the '*requirement for significant personal effort*'. These two aspects demonstrate decisions that volunteers must make: in the case of perseverance, to continue to turn up (that is, to continue the activity) – a decision made early in the volunteers' experience, and every time they engage with the activity; and

in the case of personal effort, they decide to put their own concerns aside, to turn up and to be physically, mentally and emotionally 'present' for the duration of the activity.

As volunteers become more involved in RDA, the evidence suggests there are many opportunities for them to acquire very specific knowledge, training and skill, but in the first instance, there is a requirement that they 'do things the RDA way', learn tried and tested methods and do not deviate from these. All participants in this study agreed that – whilst it was fun and they got a lot out of it – doing RDA is actually hard work. In the understanding expressed in the literature, transactional aspects of the psychological contract are those which may constitute part of a short-term contract or have easily assimilated 'actual' value – which is not always monetary (Taylor et al., 2006). The two characteristics discussed here can be seen to relate to these attributes as they represent a transaction of time, effort and energy, whether people volunteer for one session or many years.

#### 8.6.2 Relational aspects of the psychological contract

This second category of elements in the analysis of the psychological contract may be directly related to two, or possibly three characteristics of Seriousness in the volunteers in this study. The first is the *'formation of a career'* in the volunteering. In this study, although they generally disliked the term, participants agreed that it was not only possible, but likely and desirable, that a career was created through their activity in RDA. For many, this involves formal instructor qualifications; for others, it is the 'promotion' through Group, County and Regional roles, possibly onto National involvement, while for some, the concept of 'career' is a horizontal one: taking on additional responsibilities at Group level. Nevertheless, the development of a structured path through the activity is clear to see. This has been characterised as 'relational' because it emerges as serious leisure volunteers become committed to a long-term involvement with the organisation – mirroring the primary

characteristic of this type of contract in the mainstream literature, albeit on a longer-term basis than has been studied before.

The second element that fits within the category is the '*existence of durable benefits*'. These are possibly the clearest, easiest to understand elements, being the most obvious elements of the psychological contract demonstrated by the participants in this study. Durable benefits – personal growth, 'getting a lot out' of the activity, enjoyment, fun, friendship and ongoing social relationships – shone through every interaction in this study and were clearly evident. Some participants were reluctant to admit to them, feeling guilty for enjoying their volunteering when their conscience told them they should *only* be doing a good deed (representing perhaps an aberration of the concept of altruism through an overlay of misplaced guilt), but many were very happy to identify these aspects as key to their decision to continue volunteering, and a central part of their psychological contract. The importance of the social world was discussed above (sections 5.2.5 and 6.3); the formation of the psychological contract, its continuation and the signals which influence these are evidently very important and very social in this organisation.

The third characteristic – which may fit within either of two categories – is that of '*identification*'. It is very clear that participants in this study identify themselves with their volunteering activity, and in that sense, it may be associated with either a relational aspect to their psychological contract – the identification coming from associating with other, like-minded people and from developing a longer-term, affiliative relationship with RDA – or an ideological aspect, if the development of an 'RDA identity' is classified as a value of the organisation. For many participants in this study, the balance was strongly on the relational side: the identity is an outcome of social interaction over the longer term, and therefore it is suggested here that the development of personal identification with the activity is primarily a relational aspect of the psychological contract.

### 8.6.3 Ideological aspects of the psychological contract

The remaining characteristic defined by the framework of Serious Leisure is the *'development of an ethos of the activity'*. Stebbins describes the 'creation of a special social world where participants can pursue their activity' (2008). This special social world, created by the volunteers and participants themselves, emphasises the values of the organisation and encourages volunteers to live those values. In this sense, the existence of such an ethos very clearly fits within the ideological aspect of the psychological contract. Additional evidence as described in section 7.4 further confirms this when participants talk of their experience of being 'let down' by RDA on occasions when they have perceived that something contrary to the espoused values of the organisation has occurred. Although this study has not concentrated on the effects of breach and violation of the psychological contract, it is interesting that the feelings around breach and violation of the psychological contract were at their strongest and most visible when the ideological aspects were threatened. FE's account of her decision to continue volunteering, in spite of the violations she perceived to her psychological contract, demonstrate most clearly how resilient the psychological contract of these volunteers is: when she had every reason not to continue, she hung on precisely because the benefits gained by her participants were so significant that she would not let go of delivering them. As demonstrated in section 7.1.3 above, the ideological aspects of the psychological contract are very easy to identify in the present study.

## 8.7 Conclusions On The Relationship Between Serious Leisure And The Psychological Contract

The analysis of findings reported in Chapters Five, Six and Seven supports the suggestion that participants in this study demonstrate clearly all elements of the concept of Serious Leisure and that these, in turn, influence the development of the psychological contract. The

implications of this are positive for volunteer managers and for volunteers themselves, helping the development of practice which can foster an environment where a symbiotic relationship can exist. This can make the most of the affective commitment demonstrated by volunteers without the application of undue pressure. Additionally, understanding the way that volunteers interpret their expectations of the volunteering should assist the organisation with recruitment and retention strategies, but also to plan more effectively for the future by ensuring that the roles are appropriately designed and marketed to target people who are equipped and prepared to take on the challenges.

The concept of the psychological contract is not a clear-cut one. First identified in an early industrial environment and time by Argyris (1962) and Levinson et al., (1970), reimagined to explain behaviours in another period (Rousseau, 1989 and following) and then given explanatory power in many other work environments and, critically, cultures, it has an unclear identity. No single, workable definition exists – the definition changing even between papers written by the same author at different times (Rousseau, 1989; 1992; 1995). As discussed in Chapter Two and Chapter Three, each author in the field has redefined the concept slightly; methods of research and subjects of research have varied widely. Early research work was mainly quantitative in nature, whilst more recent work has taken a qualitative focus. This changes the emphasis of the findings and contributes to a wider, but less distinct, understanding of the issues around the concept. The concept is, therefore, far from static or well understood in many contexts.

It is against this background that this study has been undertaken. The findings generated by the study show that many elements of the complicated and sometimes contradictory understandings of the psychological contract do, indeed, have relevance to the volunteer in a sport organisation. Moreover, some aspects of the psychological contract are perhaps seen more clearly in this context, due to the lack of pecuniary incentives for the work people



do in the voluntary sector. This allows them to make choices and take actions based more purely on their understanding of the organisation with which they interact than they might if they were being induced to be in that place by a salary (Pearce, 1993).

The absence of emphasis on the 'negatives' of the psychological contract – breach and violation – within the dataset generated by this study serves to demonstrate the importance of shared values, culture and social cohesion in maintaining a strong and consistent psychological contract. This collective understanding – much more central to the volunteers' experience and reasons for continuing contribution than Rousseau's 'normative contract' can explain – suggests an avenue for further research in the future as a way of understanding more about the reasons for volunteers' behaviours than we currently do. Additionally, volunteers' emphasis on the importance of meeting and accepting challenges and costs in the course of their volunteering as evidence of their commitment is a factor not previously explored in the literature.

Undoubtedly, the early work – also referred to by Nichols (2013) as *pre-Rousseau* – has many more parallels with the modern-day voluntary sector than Rousseau and *post-Rousseau* studies of employed populations or MBA students. This early work remains the primary pattern for understanding the psychological contract of the volunteers in this study because it combines shared understandings, culture and history with a democratic approach to leadership by mutual agreement. The pattern of leadership in RDA is not replicated in every voluntary sport organisation, so further work is needed in other organisations, repeating this study, to establish whether this form of 'serious leisure psychological contract' is unique to RDA or could be generalised to other organisations, therefore creating opportunities to develop a deeper understanding of volunteers in sport.

## 9 – Conclusion

This thesis has examined the way in which serious leisure volunteers interact with Riding for the Disabled Association (RDA), specifically exploring their psychological contract and seeking to define and understand the factors which influence their experiences. Three clear contributions to existing knowledge have emerged from the thesis, as detailed in section 9.4 – in brief these are:

1. New volunteers of all ages begin to volunteer with the intention to do so as a serious leisure pursuit. This is termed ‘intentionality’;
2. Overlaying psychological contract theory on the Serious Leisure framework provides an enhanced understanding of why volunteers continue to volunteer in the face of difficulty and challenge. This is termed ‘resilience’;
3. Volunteers are capable of holding multiple psychological contracts simultaneously, according to the various roles they hold in the organisation.

### 9.1 Serious Leisure

The first question that this study sought to address, as set out in section 3.4, was whether the Serious Leisure framework adequately explains the commitment and behaviour of volunteers in RDA. This question has been answered affirmatively through the text as outlined in this section.

Volunteers within RDA are no longer as homogeneous as they were in the past. A quarter are now below 25 years of age, and there are many reasons for them being there. The concept of ‘volunteering as leisure’ is well established (Orr, 2006), and leisure activity is certainly an important part of the experience of volunteers. However, many participants in this study demonstrated that they view their volunteering activity as much more than a pastime, in fact it has become so important to them that it forms part of their personal

identity and an integral structure to their daily lives. When placed against the characteristics defined by Stebbins (2007) for Serious Leisure, they fit exactly into each category and therefore can be positioned as serious leisure volunteers. This status applied to all of the long-term volunteers interviewed and also to four of five newer volunteers.

From the discussions around the identification of serious leisure status of the volunteers, a number of implications and developments of the concept emerged. Serious leisure volunteers in RDA have a deep-rooted commitment to the organisation and activity. This gives them a strong sense of ownership of the roles they fulfil, making them independent decision makers who may be inclined to exhibit a resistance to management by others in the organisation. The imbalance in power relations between volunteers and volunteer managers, who might be either paid or voluntary in an organisation such as RDA, has been discussed in the extant literature (Pearce, 1993). It can cause resentment and friction, which was evident from the interviews in this study and came through particularly when some volunteers reported experiencing that other volunteers took their role 'too seriously' and demonstrated elements of empire building. Equally, some evidence of friction with salaried employees in the organisation was demonstrated, although this was ameliorated by the recognition that, in almost all cases, employees at National Office provide an excellent support service to the volunteers. The positive side of role ownership, however, was also discussed extensively and showed that serious leisure volunteers will put a great deal of time and effort into their activities to ensure they are performed to professional standards.

Findings from this study are also consistent with the literature in showing that the most effective method of recruitment for new volunteers is word of mouth, although many interviewees said that the choice to begin volunteering was not entirely free from peer-pressure. The sense of belonging to the group and being 'part' of something is very

important to these volunteers, echoing the serious leisure characteristic of forming an 'ethos' of the activity and being part of the social world.

Serious leisure volunteers reported gaining many benefits from volunteering within RDA: pleasure from benefitting others, personal development and skill development being the key benefits. However, this study also showed that many volunteers felt a sense of guilt about gaining personal benefits from an activity they primarily considered to be for the benefit of others. This should be taken into consideration by an organisation using serious leisure volunteers, where care should be taken not to emphasise the personal benefits of volunteering over the benefits to participants. Conversely, many volunteers reported significant challenges to be overcome when volunteering, exposing links to the perseverance and personal effort characteristics of the serious leisure concept. Most of these challenges related to either people or paperwork. In both cases, these are elements of the role not directly associated with their initial reasons for volunteering and needing to be addressed by a more widespread sharing of knowledge and experience throughout the organisation.

The data generated by the interviews showed a very clear route taken from just starting to serious leisure volunteer status from the very first contact with a Group until they became well embedded and regular volunteers. For many, the latter status includes holding formal roles at County, Regional or National levels, but this is not the case for all. This route, depicted in Figure 5.1, shows the steps and decisions made as the volunteer becomes familiar with the culture and practice of RDA. It is suggested that this route is specific to serious leisure volunteers in a particular organisation and, as such provides a counterpoint to existing models of volunteer engagement such as that put forward by Bussell and Forbes (2002, 2003, 2007), which describes the volunteer's life cycle, indicating that they will move in and out of the organisation – a finding which was not supported by evidence gained in this study.

An unexpected finding – one which requires further research, as suggested in section 9.5 below – is that the interviewees who were newer volunteers (classified as less than five years in the organisation) demonstrate a much faster progress through the route in Figure 5.1 than volunteers who have been in the organisation longer. Defined in this study as ‘intentionality’, this finding suggests that newer volunteers are making the decision to become serious about their volunteering early in their engagement with the organisation. For them, the benefits of participating in serious leisure are clear and they are prepared for the challenges within the process. It was stated above that four of the five newer volunteers in this study fitted clearly within the ‘serious leisure’ status; the fifth (XU) nonetheless demonstrated a clear understanding of the status. This participant exhibited an expectation that she would follow the same route as the others in time, talking about her contribution increasing ‘in a year’s time’. It is suggested that this shift might be explained – at least partly – by changes in societal pressures to achieve more than was expected in previous generations and by the drive for social responsibility on the part of opinion makers (government, employers, educational institutions), which all require evidence that people are ‘giving something back’. A further explanation, especially in an organisation like RDA where the timing of activities generally precludes regular involvement by people who work, is the creation of a social environment which mimics the workplace or other forms of social interaction, providing meaningful opportunities to develop friendships and opportunities for the achievement of personal goals. For many volunteers, the social world of RDA gives meaning to their life after retirement from work, whether due to family commitments or age.

Also emerging from findings about the route into and through RDA was evidence that the process of acculturation in the organisation happens much faster than might be expected. The explanation for this was that the culture of RDA is so strong that it pervades every aspect

of the activities. This is a finding that needs for further exploration as the impact of organisational culture on volunteers is currently underexplored in the literature.

Although serious leisure had been demonstrated in many fields of activity through the extant literature, this study contributes to our knowledge of the concept through its in-depth application to serious leisure volunteers in a large, established organisation which crosses the boundaries between sport and therapy. Understanding the decision making processes which lead to a volunteer becoming 'serious' provides information for volunteer managers which will help them to know more about the people within their organisation. Identification of the issues which affect seriousness in the volunteer provides insight into how the serious leisure status influences volunteers' behaviours and expectations.

## 9.2 The Psychological Contract of RDA Volunteers

Evaluation of the content of the volunteers' psychological contract compared to that of employees (as discussed in extant literature) was the second focus area for this study. Exploration of the literature disclosed very few studies devoted to mapping the content of employees' psychological contract. In part this can be attributed to reasons discussed by Marks (2001): that the parties to the contract and terms of the contract have become so diverse in the current employment market that any attempt to analyse content has been lost in the complexities. However, this study has been able to identify the content of the psychological contract of the volunteers in RDA by collecting data through the open and qualitative approaches taken.

The study demonstrated that the volunteers construct their psychological contract from influences in their own social environment as well as from factors in the organisation. Thus, it provides evidence in accordance with the 'pre-Rousseau' (Nichols, 2013) school of thought and the work of Dick (2006) that factors beyond the relationship between the individual and organisation shape the contract. The transmission of culture is also shown to have a

formative influence on the content of the psychological contract. There is strong evidence of a group contract, consistent with the early work by Argyris & Levinson et al., and contradicting Rousseau's assertions that it is an individual concept.

The content of the psychological contract of the volunteers in RDA has been shown by the consistency of responses gained in this study to be consistent and stable in this study. It is at variance with the content factors discussed in some papers following Rousseau's school of thought – but that is to be expected, given that this study is about volunteers rather than employees or students. The implications of these findings for the theoretical understanding of the psychological contract of volunteers are significant and, with further work, will provide support for voluntary organisations to better understand their volunteers. Furthermore, it should be noted that many of the factors described as content of an employee's psychological contract are not relevant to a volunteer. This alone is a valid reason for considering the study of volunteers as a separate discipline from mainstream work in the field of Organisational Behaviour as suggested by Pearce (1993).

Very few studies have attempted to map the content of the psychological study, either of employees or of volunteers. This study explored the content of volunteers' psychological content and showed that it can be broken into transactional, relational and ideological aspects, as often discussed in the literature, with particularly strong emphasis on ideological aspects of the contract through the importance of shared culture and values in the organisation. The strength of the ideological aspects gives resilience to the contract and reduces the likelihood of volunteers perceiving breach, a factor which would at least partially explain the demonstrated longevity of volunteering in RDA. However, in contrast to the prevailing literature, when the content of the psychological contract is represented diagrammatically (Figures 7.1 and 7.2), it is suggested that there is a shift to the left of the content from where it would be expected to be in an employment context. The implication

of this is that some elements which might be considered 'relational' in an employment context become a transaction in the volunteering context. For example, volunteers expect to receive support from National Office as a transaction – this enables them to conduct the role they occupy and is not perceived as a nice 'extra' but rather an essential part of the exchange. In mapping the content of the psychological contract, it was broken down into two sides of 'what I expect to receive' and 'what I expect to contribute' to aid understanding. This approach simplifies understanding of the content and is offered as a contribution to the analysis of the psychological contract more widely.

Furthermore, the work shows that whilst volunteers have common content to the 'organisational' psychological contract, there are small but significant variations between roles, and it suggests that a single volunteer is capable of holding complex multi-level contracts if they hold multiple roles. The parties to the psychological contract are traced and identified, moving existing understandings of the concept forward.

### 9.3 Developing Serious Leisure through the Psychological Contract

The final area to be explored by this study sought to develop existing understanding of the serious leisure framework by testing it with psychological contract theory. The two concepts appear to be linked at an intuitive level but very little work has been done previously to prove or disprove this link.

This study has established that serious leisure volunteers in RDA hold a consistent psychological contract which is strongly ideological in nature. The psychological contract combines the values and strong culture of the organisation with serious leisure characteristics of shared ethos and identification with the activity. It therefore develops volunteering beyond being just a leisure activity into it being a means by which people define themselves. In this way, the psychological contract of serious leisure volunteers is shown to be resilient to breach and resistant to change.



Analysis in this study has also shown that seriousness of volunteering in newer volunteers is a conscious decision, discussed in 9.1 above. The implications for this are that newer volunteers quickly form a psychological contract similar to long-established volunteers. This provides extensive commitment to the organisation and the contribution of knowledge and expertise. On the other side, it demands support, training and personal growth and therefore may need a more structured and challenging induction and training than has historically been provided.

A psychological contract which is formed quickly and mirrors that of more established volunteers has many advantages for the organisation. As newer volunteers are likely to reflect the increasing trend for younger volunteers, it is much more likely that they will be in place to succeed older volunteers in the more senior roles when they are needed. This would address a problem consistently identified by many voluntary organisations including RDA and provide stability for the organisation into the future.

Only Marks (2001) and Bligh and Carsten (2005) have considered the possibility that a psychological contract may have more than one focus in an organisation. Both these studies were conducted in employment contexts, although interestingly Marks (2001) places her emphasis on the role of work groups as formative influences for the psychological contract. There is compelling evidence in this study that serious leisure volunteers are creating a complex psychological contract which has several levels, or foci, depending on the roles they are performing. The creation of such a complex contract, however, paradoxically provides freedom for the volunteer to move between roles, understanding each to be separate from the others whilst retaining an overarching sense of 'RDA' in all they do.

Addressing the few critiques of the serious leisure concept, this study provides evidence that many serious leisure volunteers experience considerable personal cost from their volunteering. Meeting the cost of volunteering is part of dealing with the challenges created

by serious leisure and forms a part of the psychological contract, in that volunteers expect themselves and others to deal with the costs without complaint, seeing them as part of the experience.

## 9.4 Contributions to Knowledge

By examining the way in which serious leisure volunteers interact with Riding for the Disabled Association (RDA), specifically exploring their psychological contract and seeking to define and understand the factors which influence their experiences, this study has combined two concepts in a way which has hitherto received scant attention in the academic literature. This thesis makes three key contributions to the existing understanding of volunteers engaged in Serious Leisure:

### 9.4.1 Intentionality of Volunteering

The thesis extends the Serious Leisure framework by identifying the route that volunteers take as they start to become involved with the organisation. The evidence presented (see section 5.5) shows that newer volunteers – those currently within the first few years of their activity with RDA – have made a conscious decision that this is an activity that they relate strongly to, want to pursue as a serious leisure activity and intend to commit to for the long-term. This is a phenomenon not previously identified in the extant volunteering literature and runs contrary to existing studies (Lynch & Smith, 2009; Cuskelly, Hoye & Auld, 2006:25).

### 9.4.2 Resilience of the Psychological Contract

The thesis confirms the importance of the ideological aspect of a volunteer's psychological contract. This, especially when combined with 'serious leisure' status, provides the volunteer with a strong and resilient base for commitment to the organisation, often in the face of considerable difficulties and personal setbacks. Regardless of such setbacks, the strength of commitment thus created increases the likelihood of the volunteer remaining

with the organisation for many years (see section 7.1). The Serious Leisure framework is clear that 'perseverance' is a precondition of Serious Leisure status; this thesis demonstrates that the ideological aspects of the psychological contract with the voluntary organisation is the reason *why* volunteers persevere and demonstrate such resilience in the face of difficulties and challenges.

#### 9.4.3 Simultaneous Psychological Contracts

The thesis identifies that the psychological contracts formed by volunteers in RDA are remarkably similar regardless of the role held or the length of time in the organisation. However, it also proves that when volunteers hold several roles in the organisation, they are capable of simultaneously holding psychological contracts with multiple layers. This might encompass parties to the contract or expectations of the organisation or others (see section 8.3). An underexplored area in academic literature, this finding will have a significant impact for voluntary sport organisations because it is not uncommon for individuals to act in a number of different roles when volunteering.

Each of these contributions is offered as a development to theory, in keeping with the inductive nature of the study, and should be refined and further developed through empirical research in the future (see section 9.7).

#### 9.5 Limitations of this study

Any academic study has its limitations; this one is no different. This section will consider the limitations encountered and reflect on how they have been overcome.

The choice of RDA as an organisation in which to site this study was an easy one for me: I knew the organisation through many years' involvement, I had secure access to many volunteers and it was an area of study I would not grow tired of. This brought with it a number of challenges, however. As discussed in Chapter Two, my position as a known

person but not-quite-an-insider had the potential to be contentious and confusing to the research process. I overcame this by adopting the 'conversant observer' status which neatly summed up my position and allowed me to make use of what I know without allowing unreasonable assumptions to flow through the analysis. I had a wealth of organisational literature and material to fall back on, but as it turned out the data gathered spoke for itself in combination with extant literature and I found the organisational material less helpful than I had anticipated it would be.

The decisions around qualitative methods was based on how previous studies had approached the issues, together with a sense of what would be acceptable to participants in the study. In the event, it is clear that allowing participants to explore the issues through open – but private – conversation yielded a richness of data which would not have been achieved any other way. One-to-one interviews gave participants space to reflect on their volunteering and deal with some uncomfortable themes. As discussed in Chapter Four, it may have been possible for someone not so familiar to gain the information which came out in my interviews, but I think that some participants may have been inhibited in that case. As this was designed to be an inductive study combining theoretical frameworks in a way which had not been widely done before, there was no real blueprint for the way the research should be done. Had the study been conducted in a different way, perhaps using more participants, perhaps with an element of quantitative data collection, it may have yielded different results. However, the outcomes of analysis discussed in this thesis were very clear and the saturation point of the data was very quickly achieved. In that sense, I have confidence that the picture presented through this thesis is consistent with the way the volunteers perceive their relationship with RDA.

The outcomes and findings of this study are obviously not generalisable at this point. They are specific to one organisation which carries out very specific work and is almost entirely

volunteer-run. However, the structure and characteristics of RDA are not absolutely unique and many sport organisations will show clear similarities with RDA. Therefore, with further testing and empirical work, the principles of the contributions to knowledge detailed above should be shown to have wider application.

## 9.6 Conclusion – in search of an ‘organisational chimera’?

Far from being a whimsical illusion, the psychological contract has been demonstrated in this study to be a concept central to the experience of serious leisure volunteers in RDA. It is not easily understood, immediately obvious or simple to explain, but there is plenty of evidence that it does exist. Furthermore, just like the serious leisure framework, the psychological contract is understood by volunteers at an implicit level and used as part of their sense-making efforts when considering their volunteering activity. The outcomes of this study develop the theoretical concepts and with that, existing understandings of the committed volunteer in RDA. With further research, it may be possible to show that other volunteers, in sport or any other field, have psychological contracts which are indeed influenced by their seriousness. Some aspects of the further work required are outlined in the next section.

## 9.7 Suggestions for further work

Each of the areas below has emerged from this study. Due to the lack of attention previously paid to the analysing the psychological contract of volunteers, there are many suggestions below. All of these areas, as with the work conducted in this study, will have applicability to the voluntary sector and will help to develop understandings of the complex relationship between serious leisure volunteers and voluntary organisations.

- Further definitional clarity is needed on the psychological contract. There is no agreement in the extant literature regarding the nature of the contract – whether implicit or explicit, the group or individual nature of the contract or the parties to

that contract. Thus, research attempting to use the concept must first set out its own definitions. Clarity and agreement as to the terms and meanings of the concept would simplify research and make the concept more easily accessible to researchers and practitioners.

- The effect of time on the psychological contract of serious leisure volunteers is an area which was anticipated to be of interest and possibly an outcome of this study. However, the data gained did not support any analysis of the topic, which remains one to be investigated further in the future. To follow a number of individuals through their volunteering career in a longitudinal study, assessing the parties to, and content of, their psychological contract will doubtless show many interesting features which would develop existing theory.
- It is not clear whether a volunteer's religious or ethical values have an impact on their motivation to volunteer in an ideologically led organisation.
- Replication studies in other organisations on the route into and through voluntary roles.
- The concept of 'intentionality' is presented in this study as being new to the serious leisure framework. Further study should be made to establish whether there are particular antecedents which create intentionality, or whether, for instance, the type of activity engaged in is the common factor.
- Orr (2006) discussed the concept of 'disagreeable leisure', which was also talked about by volunteers in this study. There is a link to the serious leisure characteristic

of perseverance; it would be interesting to know more about how volunteers perceive the need to do things they dislike as part of their voluntary role and how this might affect their overall interpretation of their volunteering.

- Older volunteers in this study demonstrated two different attitudes to young volunteers (section 8.1.4) – either welcoming new talent and accepting of the likelihood that they will move on before (maybe) coming back later in life, or resenting the intrusion to their routines and seeing the youngsters as a burden. Clearly, for organisations such as RDA to continue to grow, when they are heavily reliant on volunteers to deliver their activities, the human resource base must continue to grow. Therefore, the attitude towards young and new volunteers should ideally be welcoming. Further research should explore how this can be achieved more consistently.
  
- This study identifies that volunteers are capable of holding psychological contracts which reflect multiple roles in the one organisation. These contracts have different parties to them and, to some extent, differentiated content. Further exploration of the existence of simultaneous psychological contracts is recommended as a way to develop theoretical and practical understanding of the concept, both in volunteers and the employee.

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## Appendix One: Semi structured questions for Interviews

Aim: to elicit information regarding the content of the participants' psychological contract. Based on Raja, Johns & Ntalianis (2004), Rousseau (2000) and Herriot, Manning & Kidd (1997).

Note: As discussed in section 4.4.3, these questions were amended during interview and on reflection as interviews progressed.

- At any point in your time as a volunteer with RDA have you experienced a situation where you think a volunteer (or group of volunteers) have been treated badly? By that I mean in a way that you regard as below how you expect RDA to treat volunteers.
- At any point in your time as a volunteer with RDA have you experienced a situation where you think a volunteer (or group of volunteers) have been treated favourably? By that I mean in a way that you regard as beyond how you expect RDA to treat volunteers.
- At any point in your time as a volunteer with RDA have you experienced a situation where you think a volunteer (or group of volunteers) have been acted badly? By that I mean in a way that you regard as below how you expect volunteers to behave.
- At any point in your time as a volunteer with RDA have you experienced a situation where you think a volunteer (or group of volunteers) have been acted especially well? By that I mean in a way that you regard as beyond how you expect volunteers to behave.
- Thinking in terms of your skills, do you expect RDA to help you develop further in any area?
- Do you feel that RDA reciprocates the effort you put in to your volunteering?
- Who or what do you understand me to mean when I say 'RDA'?
- Do you think there is a clear career path for volunteers within RDA? Should there be?
- How important to your decision to volunteer is a sense of belonging to RDA?
- How important is it to you that your work with RDA enhances your employment-related skills?
- Do you see your volunteering as a short- or long-term commitment? (Why?)
- Should your duties as volunteer be clearly defined for you?
- Have you been made any promises by RDA regarding what you do or what you may receive in return for your volunteering?
- As a volunteer, what do you expect to give to RDA?
- What do you expect RDA to give to you in return?