

**The Development of Youth Ministry Volunteers: from  
Management Techniques to Attention**

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## ABSTRACT

**Title:** The Development of Youth Ministry Volunteers: from Management Techniques to Attention

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**Abstract:** This thesis aims to research volunteerism within my faith-based organization, a community Christian church. This research began by investigating how volunteers can manage the non-profit when a paid leader departs. However, the empirical data shifted the focus away from how volunteers can manage the non-profit when a paid leader departs the organization and shifted the focus to asking how can volunteers be attended to during these cyclical changes. During this journey, the thesis also investigates my volunteering practice, outlines how this research and investigation changed my volunteering practice, and then outlines what themes the organization likely should focus on to support youth ministry volunteers.

The goals of this thesis are ambitious, but so is the approach that is taken within this project. The research journey was emergent, and I incorporated pluralistic methodological approaches, such as narrative inquiry, action inquiry (supported by Marshall's (2016) first-person action research), and autoethnography (as often referred to as *first-person* writing). My research focus evolved from where the volunteers were the primary source of data to a richer perspective where my practice and inquiry shaped and re-shaped how I interacted with the stories, including my own stories. I will present this evolution using the lens of inquiry cycles. The first cycle primarily relied upon analytical data using narrative inquiry. The next cycle introduced emotive data shaped by *first-person* writing. The last cycle is the culmination of the previous second cycles that occurred as I spoke with others about my findings.

Generally, the relevant organizational problem, *where volunteers must take on employee responsibilities and run part of a non-profit's operations*, served as the guiding lens for this entire research thesis. However, specifically, I began this thesis by asking *how do volunteers manage a non-profit during the cyclical turnover of their compensated leader*. As a result, one focus of the thesis is examining volunteerism and

how volunteers “*move forward*” leading the youth segment of the organization absent their paid full-time leader. Because this full-time, employed leadership position has a cyclical turnover, youth ministry volunteers must navigate rotating into new roles with greater responsibilities that the former employed leader held and later (usually after 12 to 15 months) rotating out of those roles with lesser responsibilities after a new employee is hired for the leadership position.

As I began using narrative inquiry and listening to other volunteers’ stories, I will show how I began asking a slightly different research question. I heard stories that I would categorize as volunteering triumphs and volunteering tragedies. I heard stories of how volunteers would attempt to navigate and lead the organization through the turbulence of change, but I also heard stories where I sensed joy but heard stories of volunteering fatigue. These stories pushed me to ask myself, *where do I find myself* and *how am I like ‘him’ or ‘her’*.

I began framing my research in literature supported by volunteer motivation, volunteer engagement, and volunteer commitment. Though this literature was important, I discovered new concepts during data collection that I had never considered important before, such as the difference between parental and non-parental volunteers. The narrative interviews and emerging themes thrust me deeper into *first-person action research*. So much so, I leaned into autoethnography to support how my volunteering practice will evolve.

While the thesis began by focusing on volunteers and volunteer management, it concludes with focusing on people, the volunteers themselves. The result of this research thesis then ultimately answers questions about attending to volunteers, such as why some of our volunteers continue to help manage the non-profit through employed leadership turnover and why do other volunteers stop volunteering during these events. It additionally helped me discover why I have continued to volunteer during those cycles of change. And maybe, just as importantly, the path of this journey helped me to learn how I will strive to care for and how the organization should strive to care for volunteers differently during the next leadership transition. However, this thesis journey accomplished more. As the chapters unfold, it shows how my attention shifts.

No, it develops and expands. I will show how I arrived at a much different place than where I began. And along that I journey, I traveled toward a scholarship of practice (Ramsey, 2014).

## **DECLARATION**

I, Jeremy Slayton, declare that the material contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted for any other academic award or qualification. I confirm that this body of work acknowledges the ideas, opinions and contributions drawn upon from other authors, and has been referenced in accordance with the University of Liverpool's referencing standards. The names and all other identifying details of participants have been anonymized. Ethics approval to conduct this research was sought and granted by the University of Liverpool's DBA Research Committee on October 16<sup>th</sup>, 2019.

**Signature:** Jeremy Slayton

**Date:** July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2022

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# **DEDICATION**

*To my caring wife*

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# Chapter 1 – Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

According to some authors, such as Liu *et al.* (2017) or Penner (2004), volunteerism was once considered a meaningful avenue of community service. It may have included elements of leisure or may have occurred for social purposes. But, at its core, many argued that it was often nonessential. Now, however, many researchers argue that organizations across the world depend on volunteers for their existence. And even for those organizations that do not rely on volunteers for their existence, other organizations may still depend on volunteers to redistribute social capital (Liu *et al.*, 2017; Penner, 2004).

Within this project, I find myself researching in such an organization that if it attempted to operate without volunteers, it would be only a shell of its current self. Because the organization is a community church, volunteers are essential to carrying out our various organizational programs and services. While the organization has approximately twenty full-time and part-time employees, one organizational executive estimates that volunteers total more than 350 individuals, and I am one of those volunteers. And as one of those volunteers, one problem, which I will expand upon later, is how volunteers must take on the responsibilities that are held by certain organizational employees and run segments of the non-profit when employee turnover occurs.

When I began looking at this problem, I imagined the organization and how this seemingly cyclical turnover had such cascading effects. I pictured the volunteers who would step into “temporary” roles knowing that temporary could mean greater responsibility for twelve to eighteen months. I envisioned the kids, who are a mixture of younger and older teenagers, and their various array of emotions that are derived from leadership change. I imagined how my friends (co-volunteers) may have felt during these changes. But, as I considered this problem, I rarely, if at all, focused inwardly. Rather, as I dreamed of what a “good” action research problem would look like, I dreamed of how other volunteers and I would collaborate together in groups to better understand how we can better run the nonprofit and how using an action and

reflection cycle would make us all “better” volunteers. The picture of how that thesis would be written was neat, not messy, and it likely came with a *nice bow on the top*. This phrasing will be repeated throughout this thesis.

However, even though the thesis aims to be organized and scholarly, it will depict my journey, which was, more times than not, messy. The purpose of this thesis is, then, to provide an actionable response to an organizational problem; however, this project accomplished more than that. It changed my practice as a volunteer in youth ministry. It changed how I view insider research. It changed my practice as a researcher. The latter, of which, is well beyond the scope of this thesis. The goal is that the tone will be academic, but personal. It will be rigorous, but practical. It will feel paradoxical to the reader, yet somehow through the contradictions, he or she will find reasoning and evidence.

In this introductory chapter, I discuss the initial problem, the purpose of this project. I will then discuss the context of this study and later frame the research thesis. These sections will provide a critical context for how the problem will be approached and provide an overview of how the research focus transformed, a transformation that ultimately led to reworking the research question that I was asking. Lastly, I will present a thesis overall to provide the scaffolding to the reader for the competing ideas that will follow. To set the stage of the following chapters, I will lean on Forbert-Pratt’s (2015) description of autoethnography, one of several contributions to this thesis. Forbert-Pratt (2015) said, “The reality is, simply writing an autoethnographic account is scary. . . It is exposing one’s strengths, weaknesses, innermost thoughts, and opening it up for others to criticize. It’s voluntarily standing up naked in front of your peers, colleagues, family, and the academy” (p. 821, 2015). *Is this thesis an autoethnographic account?* Hardly. But as the reader will find, the tone and voice respect and borrow from the genre. So, as I stand up, exposed, it is important to highlight that this thesis is more than just a journey of self-exploration. I will use academic literature, multiple research approaches, and empirical data. I will show the impact of the data and the conclusions that I ultimately arrived at using such data.

## **1.2 Initial Problem / Purpose of This Study**

Looking back, considering how this project unfolded, I find it interesting how I



chose the research site. There were initially two organizations that I considered to research within. The first site was the organization that I was an executive within. The second site was the organization that I have volunteered within for more than ten years.

As I considered which organization would be an appropriate fit for this research thesis, passion for and commitment to the organization were vital factors in influencing the site selection. While I contend that I had passion and commitment to both organizations, the passion and commitment to the organization that I volunteered within felt “different.” One reason for this difference could be that the volunteering organization is my local community church. As I show in the literature chapter later, a sense of identity or an attachment to the mission or organization could have promoted such passion. Another reason is that I had spent a significant amount of my free time each year supporting this organization. I had mentored kids from 7th grade through graduation. We have gone to graduations and weddings for some of those kids. Many of us have mourned losing paid leaders, other volunteers, and students after they left the organization. My adoration and attachment for the non-profit were “different.” They were deeper.

And so, in the end, I chose the site where I volunteer. As I mentioned, I have built long-lasting relationships, have made personal sacrifices to aid the organization, and have suffered loss. Many of the most painful losses that I recall occurred when the paid, full-time leader departed the organization. And each time, it seems to me that these departures each left behind a wake of uncertainty. However, one certainty over this year’s volunteering is how such employee turnover begins a cycle of change where volunteers take on additional responsibilities to help run segments of the organization until another paid, full-time leader is hired by the organization.

In my case, the segment of the organization that I volunteer within is the youth ministry. It focuses on mentoring “youth,” i.e., kids that are middle school and high school ages. On average, the hiring process has historically taken between fifteen and eighteen months to find and hire a new full-time leader. In the meantime, volunteers navigate the complexities of these additional responsibilities. Then, when a paid, full-time leader is hired, those same volunteers must then navigate different complexities of “stepping back” and “letting go” of those responsibilities. Additionally, the

organization is a local community Christian church and a faith-based non-profit, a fact that I initially deemed irrelevant. However, as my journey will show, my faith did shape the research thesis. And as I will later argue, it would have been disingenuous to ignore it.

- With this context in mind, the initial primary research question and three sub-questions that drove the first half of my research were: *How do volunteers manage a non-profit during the cyclical turnover of their compensated leader?*
  - **Sub-question 1:** *What motivates some volunteers to contribute more time and energy to help manage the non-profit during periods of employed leadership turnover?*
  - **Sub-question 2:** *How can I support other volunteers' practice and my volunteering practice in a manner to prepare us to run the non-profit when the next employed leadership change occurs?*
  - **Sub-question 3:** *How can the organization support volunteers to run the non-profit when the next employed leadership change occurs?*

I had hoped that this project would provide actionable knowledge to help us practice volunteering differently when we, the volunteers, would manage the non-profit after the next leader departed. It did provide actionable knowledge. It just did not provide the knowledge that I expected. Because of the empirical data, the focus on the research changed. I will expand upon the shift in the sub section of Section 1.4, and the following chapters will detail the conversations that steered these changes, why I believe they led to change, and how I see such changes influencing my future practice.

### **1.3 Context of the Study – Research Site and Volunteers**

As I stated above, the site selection is within a local community Christian church and a faith-based institute. In this organization, there are multiple segments, or departments, where people volunteer. Each core segment has a paid staff member who is the primary leader. Sometimes, each paid leader may even be the primary leader of multiple segments. For example, the paid employee who leads the programs for the senior adults is also responsible for, among other segments, the training and education segment and the campus security segment. This also means that this leader is, therefore,

also responsible for the managing a variety of volunteers.

As a general rule, volunteers within our organization are considered *regular volunteers*. Meaning, according to Hustinx, Haski-Leventhal, and Handy (2008), *regular volunteers* are the traditional long-term volunteers. These *regular volunteers* are also seen as part of the organization. It is rare to have *regular volunteers* who are not official members of the organization. Membership is recognized when individuals formally request membership and agree to the organization's faith doctrines. Agreement with such doctrine is affirmed through the confession that Jesus is the Christ and Lord and is, usually, followed by baptism.

For the most part, *regular volunteers* focus on serving the organization, but there are community activities that *regular volunteers* also participant within, such as missions projects, fundraising for other non-profits, and community service projects. However, the majority of volunteers are organized within the following primary segments: worship service segments, preschooler and children's segments, youth segment, adult and senior adult segments, or administrative and leadership segments. Depending on the complexity and responsibilities of each segment, each segment generally has one, or more, paid leader who manages individuals who volunteer within a particular segment. For example, the goal of the organization is to have one paid youth segment leader. As a result, in that segment, a single paid staff member is responsible for all youth ministry volunteers when that paid leadership position is occupied. However, in other segments such as the worship service segment, various paid leaders are responsible for sub-segments and often even several sub-segments. The primary drivers for these differences are complexity and scope.

Aside from *regular volunteers*, the organization does occasionally rely on *episodic volunteers*. Hustinx, Haski-Leventhal, and Handy point out that *episodic volunteers* are generally regarded as "a different kind of volunteer" (2008, p. 51). Some argue that *episodic volunteers* are noncommittal (Hustinx and Lammertyn, 2004; Wolleback and Selle, 2003). However, I am taking a broader position within this thesis that *episodic volunteers* are those who just volunteer for a short period for a specific cause or event (Hustinx, Haski-Leventhal, and Handy, 2008). By this definition, our organization utilizes *episodic volunteers*. While some of these *episodic volunteers* are members of

the organization, there are other *episodic volunteers* who are not members of our organization. Some individuals may be members of other faith-based organizations. And on occasion, some of the *episodic volunteers* may not even subscribe to the organization's belief system. *Episodic volunteers* generally participate during short-term events that focus on the children and youth ministries or focus on community mission work.

My research is bounded in the youth ministry segment that focuses on mentoring youth, which the organization classifies as middle school and high school age students. The research focus will only include *regular volunteers*. If volunteer turnover and paid employee turnover is any indication of difficulty, one could argue that this segment is one of the hardest segments to volunteer and work within. For example, for approximately the last seven years, our segment has had three different full-time leaders while all other organizational segments combined have only had a single employed leadership change.

The summer of 2018 began the last cycle where the primary leader departed the organization. The next full-time employee was not hired until fall 2019. When the data collection phase began, the paid leader had just recently become acclimated with the system, and the volunteers were just finishing their historical cycle of turning responsibilities back over to him. From my perspective, the timing of when data collection began was beneficial because volunteers were "passing the torch" to someone else, and I expected this time would help lead to greater reflection.

Additionally, data collection began when youth engagement was lower than it had been in approximately ten years. For example, right before our previous paid leader departed, we could expect approximately 175 youth to attend our large annual event with approximately 60 percent continued engagement on a weekly basis. When data collection began, approximately 120 youth attended but with only approximately 45 percent continued engagement on a weekly basis. I questioned how this drop in attendance might drive the conversations during data collection. As will be shown in later chapters, when a loss occurs, it affects volunteers differently and may ultimately affect their motivation and engagement.

## 1.4 Framing the Research

### *1.4.a Where My Research Focus Started*

I began this research thesis by asking how volunteers would manage the organization after their employed leader departed the organization. I initially focused more on general volunteerism and considered how volunteers would impact operations. I also considered looking at the costs and benefits of volunteers to the organization. As operators, *how could we leverage the benefits that volunteers bring to the organization, and how could we minimize the costs of volunteers to the organization?* During a time of cyclical change, leveraging volunteers' contributions seemed important. Even though we were volunteers managing this segment of the organization, we were still engaging other volunteers. So, in the "how do volunteers manage a non-profit," I initially focused on the "how" and the "manage" components which predisposed me toward efficiency and processes.

As I began reflecting on the research problem, I also began to consider other facets of volunteering, i.e., such as volunteering barriers and the relationship between volunteers and the organization. Literature leads me to volunteer attachment, volunteer motivation, and volunteer engagement. But at this point, many of my thoughts and research direction were impacted by literature and were cerebral. In hindsight, I believe that I was attempting to look at the organization as an outsider and attempting to look at the problem from a thirty-thousand-foot view rather than being honest with myself. I am an insider and am deeply connected to the problem and to the organization. Though, I did not initially recognize these facts.

### *1.4.b What Caused My Research Focus to Change*

However, my focus changed more drastically as I dived into data collection. There were two key events that I recall as leading to major paradigm shifts. The first major shift was during my first interview with Leia. See chapter four. The second major shift was when I *tested the plausibility* (Ramsey, 2014) of the research themes with Matthew. See chapter six. As a result, the thesis' structure, discussed later in this chapter, will develop and evolve as the research focus developed and evolved.

As one reads the Literature Review and Methodology chapters, it will be apparent that these chapters were influenced by the initial research question, *how do volunteers*

*manage a non-profit during the cyclical turnover of their compensated leader*, and the previously mentioned sub-questions. The reader may even sense how “distant” and rigid my writing voice and tone were in those chapters.

However, as I heard more and more of the volunteers’ stories, I began hearing some of my own story within some of their stories. Sometimes, I was even shocked by such differences within our stories. It triggered a process of reflecting on those potential differences more deeply. For example, (1) the seemingly haphazard nature of how several participants started to volunteer to begin with, (2) what many volunteers are motivated by, (3) and how employed leadership change can cause a feeling of powerlessness were just several stories that needed deeper reflections. As mentioned before, one key event was when Leia described her first leader’s departure. She said the departure was “like a funeral.” Her words resonated with me. That moment evoked me to not only analyzing the data but also sparked me emoting the data. As a result, the Data Analysis and Findings of the Major Themes chapter will have a major tonal change from the previous chapters.

I will expand upon these stories later in this thesis, but the main point that I want to make at this moment is that listening to the volunteers’ stories, probing for a deeper understanding, and reflecting on their stories and my story began to make me feel like an insider and feel the connection. And while the literature review and focus before those interviews had all been at the “how” and the “managing,” it was the volunteers’ words and the data that shifted my focus. The research was becoming about the volunteers themselves and about their storied-lives (Riessman, 1993). Through *first-person research*, I was also learning that I was part of the research.

Within data collection, I also started to integrate literature, my academic practice, and my practice of volunteering. Yet, even though the research was evolving, I continued to research using the lens of how volunteers manage the non-profit absent a paid leader. Despite maintaining that initial lens, I believe that my methodological openness, discussed in chapter three, supported rather than stifled the research focus transformation. I began practicing pluralistic approaches that “transitioned,” or actually interwove, one approach into another approach. Each approach was a tool. As I will later expand upon, though, I did not necessarily “put down” one tool after I “transited”

away to the next tool, but rather I continued to cycle back to reflect on each approach and how integration amplified learning. Yet, it was not until the second major shift, when I *tested the plausibility* with Matthew that I realized just how far my research focus had changed.

#### *1.4.c What the Research Ultimately Became About*

As I show in chapter six, Matthew's and my conversation became the exclamation point that emphasized just how far the research focus had developed. I describe this realization in my *Summit* moment. See Section 6.8. As I struggled to communicate to Matthew, I was confronted with the fact that the research had become about attending and caring for volunteers. Though I tried, I could no longer construct the research in the original framework and research question. As a result, the final research question was:

- *How Can Volunteers Be Attended to as They Transition into and out of Managing a Non-profit During those Cyclical Periods of Paid Leadership Turnover?*

But, as I write in chapter seven, the essence of the research focus shift could simply be stated as, *how can volunteers be attended to and cared for?* Additionally, even though the primary research question changed, the initial sub-questions remained. One potential reason that the sub-questions did not change is that I used the initial research question, *how do volunteers manage a non-profit during the cyclical turnover of their compensated leader*, as the lens for the majority of the research. Another potential reason is that the sub-questions can be attentive in nature and, therefore, continued to compliment the final question. Though, as I show in chapter seven, a fourth complementary sub-question did emerge.

Because the research was emergent, the research in this thesis was framed and will present these transitions as three cycles of inquiry. The first cycle (see chapter four) primarily relied upon analytical data using narrative inquiry. As described above, I began this cycle pretending to be an outsider and *from afar*. I bound the commencement of the second cycle within this thesis (see chapter five) when I began to understand that I was part of the problem. I was more than an *insider* in name. I began to see how I was an *insider*, how I was influencing the research, and how the research was influencing

me. Since this cycle began soon into the narrative interviews, much of this cycle occurred simultaneously with the first cycle. As shown in Appendix 4 and defended later in this thesis, research cycles can and do occur within one another. This second cycle introduced emotive data that was shaped largely by *first-person* writing. The third, and last, core cycle (see chapter six) is the culmination of the previous second cycles that occurred. Much of this cycle focused on speaking with an executive and former volunteer manager about my findings. Yet, while it was the culmination of the previous cycles' findings, the second cycle did not end before the third cycle began. It continued onward. Appendix 4 shows smaller *first-person* cycles occurring within larger cycles. And while Appendix 4 is a clearer image of the research in practice, I bound much of the writing that is likely to give the appearance that the second cycle was one long cycle rather than several smaller ongoing cycles. Where appropriate, the reader will notice *first-person* writing and evidence emerge in the third cycle writing to support the climax of the research thesis.

### **1.5 Approach Used to Address the Problem**

As Maxwell suggests, I have framed the research question so I could generate data that could achieve practical goals (2012). Since two of the objectives of the thesis are to (1) generate actionable knowledge and (2) promote change (Coghlan and Brannick, 2013), I leaned into action research to achieve those goals. However, rather than planned change, the thesis reflects emergent change. Some benefits of incorporating action research are that it is participatory and fosters an environment to challenge one's practice (Coghlan and Brannick, 2013). I initially believed that challenges to my practice would be auxiliary. However, the evolution of the project ultimately focused as much on my practice as it focused on the organizational problem.

Heron and Reason argue that research should be “with people” rather than “on people” (2006). I used their maxim to guide how I approached the problem because, as Marshall (2016) argues, I believe that inquiry is developed in the company of others. This project reinforced and bolstered this belief. As a result, I initially began collecting data using narrative inquiry while leaning into action inquiry as the action research modality. As I listened to the stories of other volunteers, it pushed me to search for my own story. What emerged by the end of the first interviews resembled the start of my



practice of *living life as inquiry* (Marshall, 2016). Marshall describes this practice as:

*“a range of beliefs, strategies, and ways of behaving which encourage me to treat little as fixed, finished, clear-cut. Rather I have an image of living continually in process, adjusting, seeing what emerges, bringing things into question . . . attempting to open to continual question what I know, feel, do and want, and finding ways to engage actively in this questioning and process its stages”* (1999, p. 156-157).

This process of adjusting and questioning continued into my writing. Here, *writing as inquiry* (Marshall, 2016) encouraged me to incorporate more of an autoethnographic approach. Through this process, I argue that I ultimately found my voice in this writing. And as I will show, I discovered deeper learning that prompted the individual change and promoted organizational change.

### **1.6 Overview of the thesis and thesis structure**

The remaining structure of the thesis will be divided into the following major chapters: (Ch 2) Literature Review (Ch 3) Research Design and Methodology (Ch 4) Cycle 1 - Data Analysis and Findings of Major Themes (Ch 5) Cycle 2 - First-Person Account and Practice Development (Ch 6) Cycle 3 – Testing the Plausibility, and (7) Conclusion, Reflections, and Implications.

Chapter two will focus on the literature review. The aim is to outline key concepts in volunteerism and support the thesis' focus on changes that occurred in my practice as a volunteer. Even though the literature review helped initially frame my research, the research was emergent. As a result, the research process continued to shape the literature review chapter throughout the thesis, and as the literature review chapter transformed, the literature then altered the following cycles of inquiry and research. For example, the literature review initially provided connections between theories and some of the phenomena that were occurring within our organization, such as the background on how volunteers' motivation and commitment influences volunteerism. However, during the narrative interviews with the volunteers, some of their stories reshaped how I viewed volunteers' motivation and commitment. This inquiry not only informed new ways in how I understood some of the previously read literature but also pointed me to search out new literature. After those particular interviews, I revisited the literature to dive deeper into motivation and commitment. This cycle then informed the next phase

of inquiry during my next interviews. So, as these connections developed and evolved through data collection, as Marshall and Rossman highlight, I sought literature in search of new links (2014). As a result, these new links informed new paths of inquiry. In total, there were six initial interviews with six different volunteers, which will be highlighted later. In the second set interviews, I reinterviewed five of those six volunteers.

Chapter three attempts to outline the overall research design by discussing methodology, methods of inquiry, and how my research design lays within action research. One aim is to support my rationing of the research studies design and data collection method (Marshall and Rossman, 2014), although I believe the chapter has a much larger task that it must complete. Because the research was emergent, the research design was flexible enough to be emergent as well. This led to a somewhat paradoxical use of methodologies and action modalities. The task that chapter three attempts to achieve is to make sense and order of the culmination of several paradigms and to defend how these many tools were important to achieve the project's goals.

Chapter four presents the first cycle of inquiry framed by the data analysis and findings of the major themes. There, I first discuss an overview of the three major themes and then follow up with a detailed account of each theme. Each theme section presents the data that prompted its emergence and then a discussion of the importance of that theme. The focus on these themes is at the volunteer and organizational levels. When considering this research question, it is here that the themes exist to call other volunteers and the organization to action with the data supporting such action. It is also in this chapter that I show the seeds from the narrative data that supports the research shift away from managing other volunteers towards attending to other volunteers. However, I said other volunteers. *Why not me?*

Therefore, in the next chapter, chapter five, I discuss the second cycle of inquiry and how those three themes call me into action, discuss my learning, and detail how the themes influenced my practice. Whereas the previous chapter was more influenced by *second-person inquiry*, chapter five was heavily influenced by *first-person inquiry*. However, as I hoped to have shown in the methodology and empirical chapter, these persons of inquiry bled into one another. In this chapter, I borrowed from the autoethnography genre and leaned into Marshall's (2016) suggestion of *writing as*

*inquiry*. For my personal volunteering practice, chapter five was thought to be the climax of the actionable outcomes of this project. However, further inquiry revealed that I had not quite reached the peak of the thesis.

The thesis aim was to address an organizational problem of managing volunteers through leadership turnover. As a result, chapter six focuses on the third cycle of inquiry by testing the three themes for volunteers, as a group, and the organization with key current and former organizational employees. The stated goals are to (1) *test the plausibility* of the research themes and (2) to *sell* actionable responses to these themes (Ramsey, 2014), although, I wanted the dialog with the management to be more than recording their responses. Because of the executive's and manager's experience, I believed that they could add to the empirical data and continue to shape the themes. The chapter records their responses, any new data that emerged, and discusses the influence of their perspective. Because of healthy conflict that occurred, these conversations prompted me to describe a change that was occurring within me. I started the thesis at one place, but I discovered that I my attention expanded. It is in chapter six that I clearly show and recognize that I had stopped researching *how to manage volunteers* back in the first cycle of inquiry and shifted to researching *how do we care for and attend to volunteers*. The data in this chapter reveals the necessary stimulus for me to make sense of this transformation.

Lastly, chapter seven discusses the conclusions, reflections, and implications of my research. Because the thesis is time-bound, the total impact of the research may not be known for years from now when our recently hired full-time leader departs the organization. As a result, the thesis will not examine the impact of this action but rather examine how volunteers and senior leaders responded to what is learned and the *ideas that I attempted to sell them* (Ramsey, 2014). The chapter also highlights the action that has been occurring in my practice because of this research, although I have attempted to limit the scope of discussing my practice to chapter five. But as I will show, one cannot be fully discussed without, at times, discussing the other. From the organizational level to my personal volunteering practice, from volunteering to scholarship, I aim to show how much each is intertwined with one another. So much so, I conclude the thesis by arguing that a scholarship of practice (Ramsey, 2014) was experienced.

## Chapter 2 - Review of the Literature

### 2.1 Introduction

The literature review will explore facets of volunteerism and the effects that organizations and volunteers have on each other. Several components of volunteerism that will be explored below include, but are not limited to, volunteer motivation, commitment, engagement, and attachment. But the initial crux of this project was focusing on *how do volunteers manage a non-profit absent a paid leader?* As a result, I will also examine these facets through the lens of nonprofit leadership transition, the effects that such a transition has on volunteers, and consider some potential responses that the organization and volunteers can incorporate to help the management process as the nonprofit is without a paid, full-time leader. Each section will attempt (1) to outline how literature has contributed to my thinking, (2) to show how these new thoughts have shaped my perspective specifically to managing a nonprofit through turnover of the paid, full-time leader, and (3) to bring forward the literature-generated questions that will need to be answered through my research so later action can occur.

Before the data collection phase that ultimately led to a shift in research focus, I took the position that it was important to understand what motivates volunteers to continue to volunteer and help lead the non-profit through these change events (Bassous, 2015; Hustinx and Handy, 2009; Yeung, 2004). As I will show in later chapters, my personal experience is that leading the non-profit during transitional times can be difficult. So, before I could better understand how volunteers could operate the non-profit, I believed it was first necessary to understand why volunteers would even subject themselves to the headaches that I thought that I had endured as a volunteer. This dilemma had me wondering how, if at all, were volunteers' motivations different than paid employees (Farmer and Fedor, 1999)? And since the research site is a faith-based organization, *are the motivations of our volunteers materially different than the "typical volunteer"?*

During the literature review, volunteer motivation then led me to research commitment (Hustinx and Handy, 2009; McBey *et al.*, 2017; Yeung, 2004), which will be discussed through both the lens of organizational commitment as well as volunteer

commitment (McBey *et al.*, 2017; Meyer and Allen, 1991). Even though some researchers argue that volunteers' commitment is similar to one another in varying degrees, as I will show later, subtle differences do exist that can be critical (Boezeman and Ellemers, 2007; van Vuuren *et al.*, 2008). I did not realize the importance of these differences until I discovered the parental and non-parental theme which will be discussed in later chapters.

As I read the literature, I began to question the effects of volunteer turnover on other volunteers' ability to manage the non-profit. Despite my perceived commitment and number of hours volunteered, I could not recall a single time that I recruited other volunteers. When a paid staff member departs, I only remember that either (1) another paid staff member helps recruit other volunteers to support the system, or (2) the existing volunteers consolidate and began cutting programs so that they can manage the load. Because of this, I will also discuss Bittschi *et al.* (2019) who argue how volunteer turnover can be devastating. *How do volunteers respond when other volunteers quit?* However, the literature raises many more questions, such as *are commitment and motivation the only factors that influence volunteer turnover though? How does attachment fit into literature? How do we recruit additional volunteers? How do we determine the right fit or right spot for not only the new volunteers but also for existing volunteers?*

Lastly, I discuss literature that emerged only after my research focus began to shift. As I discuss in more detail below, in *The Reshaping of My Perspective Management*, themes emerged from data collection that compelled additional cycles of literature review. Because, at the time, I had not fully recognized the need to change the research question, I continued to examine the literature through the lens of tools to help manage the nonprofit (Hager and Brudney, 2015; Studer, 2016; Traeger and Alfes, 2019). However, by this point, the reader is likely able to recognize the drifting toward attending to the volunteers and focusing on the people rather than toward managing volunteers and processes. I was already considering questions, such as when a leader leaves the organization, *how are volunteers viewing their current roles? Are we attempting to 'exist' until the next paid staff is hired? Or are we looking to strive toward a healthier organization? What is the role of volunteer management?*

## **2.2 Literature Search Strategy and Volunteerism Overview**

In this section, I will outline the literature search strategy, discuss the definition of volunteerism that will be used during this project, the potential benefits that volunteers provide to the organization, the organization's impact on volunteerism, and, lastly, look at whether volunteers are reliable enough to be part of the organizational solution or whether their unreliability is the problem. This overview is meant to provide the scaffolding that will later be used to discuss later topics, such as motivation, commitment, engagement, and attachment.

### *2.2.1 Literature Search Strategy*

As may be apparent in the following sections, my literature search strategy began broadly by searching how literature frames volunteerism. Without first defining volunteerism through the literature, I believed that my biases and assumptions could lead to my missing key search terms.

The majority of the volunteerism literature was obtained through the University of Liverpool's online library that is powered by EBSCO Discovery Service, which incorporates many databases across academic literature, healthcare, and corporate, just to name a few. As a general rule, I would initially limit my search to two databases: (1) Academic Search Complete and (2) Business Source Complete. The purpose for this initial restriction was to focus on quality while also not allowing an overwhelming number of potential articles.

In several cases though, I had to broaden the databases to search for relevant literature specifically related to volunteerism. As a result, some literature is drawn from seminal and older sources. In response to this, when appropriate, I attempted to scaffold the literature from primary sources, such as Meyer and Allen (1991), and then intertwine it with other literature.

### *2.2.2 Defining Volunteerism within this Project*

According to Wilson, volunteerism has a wide degree of definitions, including some specific definitions. However, because of such narrowness, these definitions can be imprecise. Broadening the definition of volunteers can be helpful but has the disadvantage that volunteerism across the spectrum becomes dissimilar to one another

(2012). For example, from a broad perspective, Snyder and Omono (2008) define volunteerism as freely helping to support individuals or causes often through an organization. On the other hand, Bidee *et al.*'s (2013) definition becomes more focused. I will use Bidee *et al.*'s (2013) definition that volunteerism is performing an activity freely for those that are outside of one's own household. Bidee *et al.* (2013) add that volunteers are free from formal obligations, unpaid, but may work within a formal organizational structure.

Additionally, Cnaan *et al.* (1996) argue for four dimensions that build the cornerstones of volunteerism:

- (1) Free will - ranging from obligated to complete free will
- (2) Nature of Reward - ranging from remuneration to no tangible reward
- (3) Organizational Nature - ranging from friendships to operating within a formal organization
- (4) Identity of Beneficiaries - ranging from personal relationships to new/unfamiliar population

Each of these dimensions can be seen in Bidee *et al.*'s (2013) definition, and when I began this project, I considered Bidee *et al.*'s (2013) definition the best fit for those volunteering within our organization. The mobility and lack of formal obligation resonated with my experience. Volunteers come and go. We have those who volunteer for a weekend event and others who volunteer consistently and weekly. We have those whom I expect to see volunteering at every event, and we have others who quickly *fade away* from volunteering soon after committing. We also have a formal structure that volunteers must participate within. For many volunteers, and all those volunteering with minors, we have background checks. We have managers and executives, often paid employees of the organization. Yet, as Wilson (2012) highlighted, narrowness can be problematic.

Because of my biases and perspective, I had assumed those who volunteered within our organization did so to support those outside of their own household. As I will show in later chapters, this is not always the case. While some people volunteer to help those outside of their household, others, however, volunteer specifically to benefit those

within their household. And still, there are those individuals who volunteer because of some sort of combination. As a result, Snyder and Omono's (2008) definition will ultimately be the lens through which I will examine volunteerism. Volunteers within this project are those who are freely helping to support other individuals or causes.

### 2.2.3 *Benefits of Volunteerism to the Organization*

It is debated whether volunteers actually provide meaningful benefits to organizations. On one extreme of the argument, some researchers (Lewig *et al.*, 2007; Wilson, 2012) argue that some industries and organizations would struggle for survival or, worse, could never survive without volunteers. However, on the other end of the argument, others, such as Handy and Mook, argue that volunteers are inefficient and take paid jobs from those that need them. As a result, the benefits that organizations gain are offset by the cost (2008).

I will take Lewig *et al.*'s (2007) and Wilson's (2012) position within this project because I have experienced how programs within our organization are extremely dependent on volunteers. Without volunteers, such programs would be eliminated. We have cut back on programs when volunteers turnover was high, and we have been able to add programs when more volunteers were recruited.

However, the benefits of volunteers can be viewed from perspectives other than asking whether they are critical versus cannibalistic. Another perspective is examining the degree of benefits to an organization from a performance and efficiency perspective. Kang (2019) took this latter approach which moved the debate from (1) *yes, we need volunteers* vs (2) *volunteers are problematic* to asking *how are volunteers beneficial and when are volunteers most efficient and effective?*

Even though focusing on the performance of volunteers is beyond the scope of this project, I believe that *how volunteers manage the non-profit* has a performance component to it. As a result, I examined this literature to better broaden my understanding of volunteerism. I was not surprised to read that Kang (2019) found that volunteers do typically significantly contribute to performance gains. As stated above, our organization would directly cut programs and activities if volunteers could not run those programs and activities.

However, I found the details more interesting. Kang (2019) shows that performance



gains are not linear based on more volunteers. Organizations need to maintain a certain threshold of volunteers or recruit enough volunteers to exceed critical mass. However, the threshold and critical mass work differently among different organizations and varying agencies. For example, even within a more professional setting, such as law enforcement or firefighters, volunteers can positively influence performance. However, beyond a particular size, such as Kang's (2019) firefighter example, negative performance shifts begin to occur. Kang argues that one explanation is that the demand for volunteers as a substitute for paid staff is not perfectly elastic (2019, p. 572). Achieving a critical mass of volunteers to increase performance is consistent with my volunteering experience, and as I will discuss in later chapters, I now believe that seeking a mixing of volunteers can also help volunteers manage the non-profit.

#### *2.2.4 Organizations Impact on Volunteerism*

As I initially considered *how volunteers managed a non-profit*, I questioned how the organization can influence and impact overall volunteerism. Looking back, I think that I commenced this project with the presumption that the volunteers' ability to manage the non-profit will be constrained in some form or fashion by the organization. With nearly every paid leadership departure, I have taken more responsibility. I believe that this presumption, though, had much to do with my experience working within the organization at those moments. I recalled two major moments within my volunteering practice when I took on an even greater leadership role. And each time, I recall how frustrated that I became when attempting to navigate such a role. As a result, I deemed this background within the literature review critical and will expand upon it below.

Firstly, as some researchers (Hustinx and Handy, 2009; McBey *et al.*, 2017; Meyer and Allen, 1991; Yeung, 2004) point out, using volunteers in place of paid employees is not some sort of magic bullet, and it does not necessarily mean that the organization eliminates the need for *human resource management*. As those researchers write about, organizations impact volunteerism within their organization and are still likely to struggle with many of the same problems with volunteers that occur with compensated employees, such as burnout, exhaustion, motivation, commitment, and turnover. These arguments definitely resonated with my two specific experiences when I became frustrated.

Additionally, Chen and Yu examined several possible drivers of why similar problems exist, despite the class of workers, i.e., paid employees or volunteers. One potential cause that such similar problems exist is that many organizations continue to focus on maximizing productivity at the expense of workers (2014). From a strict point of view, I do not consider our organization driven by maximizing productivity. We do not have scorecards, quotas, or benchmarks to achieve. However, as I consider the problems that volunteers face when they lead the organization, productivity is a factor from a broader perspective. We consider how volunteers can accomplish more, be responsible for more, and be involved more. As Lewig *et al.* (2007) argue, I believe that we do so out of necessity. As a result, I see how our organization approaches “maximizing productivity” as “getting all that they can out of each volunteer.”

Another potential driver that Chen and Yu mentioned was the significant overlap that exists between paid and unpaid workers. As a result of this overlap, organizations may attempt to manage these workforces similarly (2014). I found this driver interesting because I have felt frustrated at times when some within the organization seemed to treat me as an organizational employee. Even though this frustration has been extremely rare with my direct volunteering manager [meaning when we had a paid leader], this frustration had often manifested absent of such a leader. Usually, I recall this frustration when I needed to work with indirect volunteering managers [meaning, outside of the student department] or when other volunteers with whom I did not agree attempted to lead the department. I would describe my frustration as having the responsibility but lacking the tools and control to engage in such responsibilities. However, despite my frustrations at times, I have continued to volunteer. According to Dwyer *et al.* (2013), organizations should seek to create long-lasting bonds between volunteers and themselves., and I believe that this long-lasting bond is why I have continued to volunteer. Later, I will expand on this when I discuss motivation, engagement, and attachment.

As I consider these long-lasting bonds, I question the organization’s influence on volunteer turnover. Typically, when the paid leader leaves the organization, the volunteers manage the majority of the operations until another full-time leader is hired. On average, the volunteers operate without a paid leader for approximately eighteen months. I have always considered these periods of transition, when either a leader

departs or when a new leader arrives, as a major period for volunteer turnover and when volunteers *fade away*. Meaning, volunteers gradually miss more and more scheduled events. Absenteeism typically starts slowly but accelerates. Then one day, we realize that some volunteers no longer participate. They just *faded away*. As a result, I have held a presumption that after this eighteen-month period where volunteers have managed the non-profit, many of these volunteers will cease to volunteer. I do not have data to support what volunteering turnover is during these periods since it is beyond the scope of this project. But, as I get into the narrative data in later chapters, I do believe that considering volunteer turnover is important. As McBey *et al.* argue, volunteer turnover can have a long-term impact on organizations, including morale, the ability to recruit, and the ability to conduct its mission. One way that organization impacts volunteerism then is their perceived support (2017).

However, labor turnover, in and of itself, may not be a catalyst for negative outcomes. As Meier and Hicklin (2008) highlight, turnover can often lead to positive performance outcomes. Hector discusses this in later chapters when he mentions how new parental volunteers bring new energy into the group. As a result, when I consider how volunteers can manage the nonprofit, literature bifurcates turnover into excess labor turnover and normal turnover. Excess labor turnover (ELT) is considered to be different than *normal* turnover in the velocity of turnover. Several researchers (Gialuisi and Coetzer, 2013; Wagar and Rondeau, 2006) point out that ELT can lead to either short-term negative effects, and or long-term negative effects on performance and organization goals.

I think more importantly to my question, Bittschi *et al.*, (2019) argue how ELT can possibly be an indicator of fragile organizational health. As we, the volunteers, attempt to manage the non-profit, it may be critical for those volunteers to understand whether they are operating in a fragile environment. *Are volunteers leaving from normal turnover, or is something more systematic occurring? Is turnover excessive and is something fragile that we are not seeing? If organizational fragility is a problem, how do volunteers respond and manage differently in that environment?*

I believe these questions may be important because organizational fragility could potentially influence the fatigue that volunteers may experience. James will highlight

this from his narratives in later chapters which echoes part of Cho and Lewis's research. They show that short-term productivity can be hampered because of the void that the unfilled position created. This void is an important consideration in light of labor flow. Voids indicate that such labor flow could be avoided (2012). However, the organization may not impact volunteer turnover and volunteer labor flow as much as volunteer reliability. *Can volunteers ever even be depended on as managers? Can they be trusted to manage the non-profit? And if so, to what extent can they be trusted?*

#### 2.2.5 Volunteer Reliability: Are Volunteers Reliable Enough to Depend On?

As I read the organization's impact on volunteers and volunteer turnover literature, the topic of volunteer reliability arose. Initially, I deemed the topic beyond the scope of this thesis. However, as I continued to read the literature and continued to consider our organization's practices, I now believe the topic is relevant because it may be an underlying bias that some organizational employees possess. I believe that I have even held this bias myself at times. As paid leaders transition in or out of the organization, many tasks transition to and from volunteers. *Should we trust volunteers with more responsibilities? Are paid employees better to handle responsibilities?*

Vantilborgh and Van Puyvelde define *volunteer reliability* as volunteers completing the stated agreed-upon tasks and contributing what they promised to the organization (2018, p. 29). Some researchers (Cnaan and Cascio, 1998; Vantilborgh and Van Puyvelde, 2018) point out that, unlike paid employees, volunteers are freer to choose when, where, and even how they will perform activities. And if they feel compelled, they can often easily withdraw partially or entirely from such activities. As a result of this mobility, Vantilborgh and Van Puyvelde highlight that managing such a class of workers could be deemed complex, and possibly difficult. Yet, these researchers also argue that ensuring that volunteers are reliable is critical to accomplishing the goals of an organization (2018). I believe this is the crux of volunteer reliability within this project. This project is taking the position that the organization would eliminate many activities that volunteers are routinely responsible for. Although after a paid leader departs, the organization becomes even more dependent on volunteers. Still, I have had many relationships with other volunteers over the years. One day, I considered them highly reliable. Other days, they were gone. Many times, I

could not even recall the moment or the reason that they stopped volunteering.

As Vantilborgh and Van Puyvelde point out, one of the biggest issues with unreliable volunteers is that organizations may not be able to fulfill their duties or obligations to their beneficiaries (2018). *How would volunteers who are attempting to manage the non-profit engage volunteer reliability?* Farmer and Fedor (1999) and Vantilborgh and Van Puyvelde (2018) argue that we are likely unable to manage individuals traditionally because we would lack the power to enforce volunteers to fulfill their promises.

Nichols and Ojala (2009) and Vantilborgh and Van Puyvelde (2018) write that a possible solution that many organizations incorporate to overcome this problem is to reduce the amount of responsibility that volunteers have within the organization. Firstly, because of funding, reducing volunteers' responsibilities would be impossible. Secondly, Van Vurren *et al.* (2008) and Wilson (2000) both argue that this can be short-sighted because volunteers will not be as committed, and Brudney (2011) and Kang (2019) argue that this approach will lack the critical mass of volunteers to achieve efficient operations.

*So, how can volunteers who manage the non-profit influence volunteer reliability?* Farmer and Fedor (1999) and Vantilborgh and Van Puyvelde (2018) argue that organizations can focus on an exchange agreement where both volunteers and the organization explicitly agree to specific contributions and inducements, such as social contracts, recognition, or empowerment. If such inducements were withheld or changed without an agreement, the likelihood of volunteers becoming unreliable increases exponentially. This argument is later echoed in the volunteers' stories in the empirical chapters. Ultimately, what I consider a critical theme emerges from such exchange disruptions. Later in this chapter, I will expand upon the researchers' argument when I discuss redevelopment. There, it will echo Vantilborgh and Van Puyvelde when they wrote that the reliability of an individual has less to do with one's personality but more to do with the day-to-day occurrences that impact the exchange agreement / the psychological contract (2018). But first, I will examine how motivation, commitment, engagement, and attachment may influence volunteers.

## 2.3 Motivation, Commitment, Engagement, and Attachment

### 2.3.1 Overview

As I highlighted previously, when I began the thesis considering *how the volunteers would manage the non-profit*, I held the initial belief that highly motivated, committed, and engaged volunteers made managing the non-profit easier. Because I had experienced continued volunteer turnover throughout the years, I believed that promoting volunteers to attach to the organization would help decrease volunteer turnover and provide more stability to the organization.

However, as I will expand upon in later chapters, my presumptions were nearly immediately destroyed as I began to listen to the volunteers' stories. I now look at these topics differently. Rather than these topics being some sort of *magic bullet* to help volunteers manage the non-profit, I now see these topics as a lens to view different volunteers at different moments while they participant in volunteerism. Motivation, commitment, and engagement are more the instruments to measure a volunteer's potential utility to the organization. I began to view them as instruments to better attend to the people who volunteer. Below, I will discuss each of these topics within the context of the literature review. At times, my initial "distant" thirty-thousand-foot perspective will be present. Later, though, my goal will be to show how my perspective has evolved towards caring for and attending to the individuals.

I will begin by discussing volunteer motivation. As I will outline later in this chapter in the *questions that arose from the literature* section, I believed it was critical to understand what motivated other volunteers. Next, I examine organizational commitment. I begin broadly. but subsequently shift toward a narrower lens of volunteer commitment. Out of the literature review, I discovered engagement and attachment. I held the assumption that if volunteers are motivated and committed, then they are engaged. However, as I will discuss, my assumption was misguided. In the last of these topics, I will briefly discuss attachment. When I first read attachment literature, I considered volunteer attachment as the goal of my research. *How can we get everyone to attach to the organization?* I now believe this was another naive thought. Rather than attachment being an actionable goal to achieve through volunteer management, I envision it as state that volunteer management can be aware of. As I will elaborate later,

I believe that attachment has its place in this project and literature review, but its emphasis has been curtailed.

### *2.3.2 How Are Volunteers Motivated? Are Faith-Based Volunteers Motivated Differently?*

Robbins (1993) defines motivation, at its core, as an individual's willingness to exert high levels of effort toward achieving personal or organizational goals. As Ramlall *et al.* (2004) point out, researchers differ on the source of the energy that allows individuals to strive towards such goals. However, they also point out that most motivational researchers believe that motivation needs (1) the individual to have a desire to act (2) the individual to have the ability to act, and (3) the individual to have a goal to strive towards.

From a broader perspective, there are many competing views on how volunteers are motivated, and, therefore, what volunteer motivational categories should exist, such as in Butt *et al.* (2017), Clary *et al.* (1998), and Esmond and Dunlop (2004). However, Chacón *et al.* (2007) emphasize that one consistency among these researchers is that all motivational categories and functions are informed by either altruistic or egotistic factors. *How are volunteers within our organization motivated? Is it as simple as either altruistic or egotistic factors? How can motivation be leveraged to manage the non-profit?* From my own experience, I would even argue that my personal volunteering motivations have vacillated between altruistic and egotistic factors. As I will write about my experiences in later chapters, I see those experiences as not an either-or but as but-and where motivations are on a continuum and move in time. There were moments that I volunteered out of more altruistic factors and moments that I volunteered out of more egotistic factors. I can also see Chacón *et al.*'s (2007) position that volunteers' motivations are altruistic and, or, egotistic developed in themes later on.

Additionally, one of the most popular volunteering motivational models is by Clary's *et al.* (1998). In their research, Clary *et al.* (1998) examined the motivational foundations of sustained volunteerism. From those motivational foundations examined, Clary *et al.* compiled foundations into a Volunteer Functions Inventory model (VFI) that can help match (by guiding or recruiting) volunteers and organizations to one

another. Additionally, the authors believe that VFI can help signal whether an individual's volunteerism could evolve as well as identify what factors are more likely to sustain those individuals through continued, long-term volunteerism (1998). The six VFI functions that Clary *et al.* (1998) outlined included (1) Values (2) Understanding (3) Enhancement (4) Career (5) Social and (6) Protective. Clary and Snyder (1999) continue by outlining the importance of matching the person's motivations that led to volunteering to their position. I consider my position, or really, my responsibilities from certain positions as highly relevant to how motivated I have been in the past. This leads me to ask, *is the VFI model relevant to motivating volunteers, or is motivating volunteers much more transparent?*

Additionally, for longevity and sustainability, some argue that Role Identity is more critical (Charng, Piliavin, and Callero, 1988; Grube and Piliavin, 2000). As Chacón *et al.* (2007) highlight, individuals' self-concept needs to integrate into the organization. Being a volunteer and or a leader should become part of who they are and their identity, so a volunteer's behavior becomes more independent of outside factors, such as in our case, stressors due to a lack of a paid leader. However, this becomes a double edge sword. As the themes develop, Role Identity seems to play an important part. As I read through the literature, I had considered the question, *how do we build role identity*, which is an important focal point. However, after listening to volunteers, I now believe managing the non-profit without a paid leader is not about building Role Identity but is about asking, *what happens when I lose my (role) identity?*

Though, motivation and its relationship to identity may be more complex in this thesis than just considering Role Identity (Charng, Piliavin, and Callero, 1988; Grube and Piliavin, 2000). As stated in chapter one, the research site is a religious faith-based local church. As a result, *is how faith-based volunteers view their identity materially different than non-faith-based volunteers? If so, what is the impact of their faith identity on their motivation?* Meaning, individuals may be volunteering from faith motivations, and therefore their identity lies in their faith, rather than volunteering from role identity motivations. Denning's (2021) offers some support for this position. As Denning (2021) shows, volunteers in faith-based organizations are considered to be acting out their faith as they volunteer.



However, it may not be as simple as volunteers who volunteer in faith-based organization do so because they are acting out of their faith. As Wilson (2012) shows, those who ‘regularly’ attend religious services do tend to volunteer more often regardless of the volunteering site. Einolf and Yung (2018) even argue that an organization is more likely to find a “*super-volunteer*,” defined as one who volunteers for ten hours or more in a week, in those volunteers who attend religious services “significantly more often.”

Von Essen *et al.* (2015) also show that religious service attendance remains a key predictor no matter whether the participant is volunteering within a religious or secular organization. Yet, volunteers who regularly attend religious services still overwhelmingly stated that they volunteered “mostly . . . out of love for God and love for [their] neighbor” (2015, p. 136). According to Von Essen *et al.* (2015), again, this reason is in spite of whether individuals are volunteering in a religious or secular organization.

I also think it is critical to point out that Denning (2021) argues that faith-based motivations are not out of superiority or are exclusionary to religious volunteering sites. Rather, Denning (2021) writes that volunteers’ motivations are inherently relational despite whether individuals are volunteering in faith-based or secular organizations. As a result, religious volunteers’ motivation should not be considered oppositional to secular volunteers’ motivation. However, those volunteers who attend religious services regularly do likely seem to place a higher emphasis on Clary *et al.*’s (1998) value function which ultimately seems to drive higher participation (Denning, 2021; Von Essen *et al.*, 2015).

Like Denning’s (2021) position, my presumption was that religious individuals volunteered as a means to work out their faith. However, as I will show later, I do not believe that inquiry could support this position. Data showed individuals volunteering for their families, for their partners, for relationships, and for purpose. Faith was obscured. Denning (2021) points out that literature, typically quantitative, often frames volunteers’ motivation as static rather than an ongoing journey. The data that I present may likely echo such a journey. This could explain why faith as a motivation seems ambiguous. Faith may be a critical factor at times, but other factors also influence the volunteers (Denning, 2021). As a result, I will need to remember that I will only witness

static moments in the volunteers' lives.

Also, Wilson (2012) also shows that the prime stimulator for volunteering is an invitation. *Is it possible that those who attend regular religious services encounter more invitations?* Such a question is beyond the scope of this thesis, but I believe that this question could be an important lens when considering motivation. Initially, I ignored the motivational impact that the research site is a faith-based organization. I inadequately accounted for this influence by relying on Clary *et al.*'s (1998) value function. Though, literature shows that motivation because of faith is more complex (Denning, 2021; Wilson, 2012). The fact that the research site is a church is likely to be a factor. This context will be considered but answering questions, such as *to what extent is faith a motivational factor, is faith identity more important than role identity, and does volunteers who regularly attend religious service volunteer more because of greater exposure to invitations* are beyond the scope of the thesis. I argue that the most important aspect is that faith likely influences motivation and, therefore, needs to be considered, but the degree is unclear (Denning, 2021; Von Essen *et al.*, 2015; Wilson, 2012).

### 2.3.3 A Brief Discussion of Meyer and Allen's (1991) Organizational Commitment Theory

As Jaros (2007) points out, one of the dominant models of organizational commitment is the three-component model by Meyer and Allen (1991). In their article, Meyer and Allen (1991) outlined the conceptualization of organizational commitment and the components:

- *Affective commitment* examines the emotional attachment to, identification with, and actual involvement within their organization. Simply, affective commitment defines the 'want to' stay rather than the 'need to' stay (Meyer and Allen, 1991, p. 67).
- *Continuance commitment* examines the need rather than the emotion and refers to the recognition of the costs related to leaving an organization. As result, a person is more committed to an organization if the perceived cost is higher and, therefore, the need to remain with the organization will be higher. This perceived cost can materialize in many forms, such as salary, benefits, power,

and social relationships (Meyer and Allen, 1991)

- *Normative commitment* examines the feeling of obligation and the ‘*ought to*’ stay position. A person with a high normative commitment will feel a high *moral* obligation to an organization. Because this feeling of responsibility is internalized, it varies from individual to individual. However, an organization can promote such a commitment through investing in people, such as job training, promotion, and other opportunities. (Meyer and Allen, 1991)

Within this model, Meyer and Allen argue that these components lead to how and why people are dedicated to an organization. Additionally, the authors argue that people have varying degrees of each of these commitments, and each could change independently over time (1991).

Meyer and Allen (1991) also highlight the distinction between a psychological state of commitment and a behavioral state of commitment. For example, one may behaviorally act committed to an organization through a high level of performance, but that person’s commitment level may be to a personal level of performance rather than to the organization. However, even if individual, personal standards are the cause of a high level of performance, Meyer and Allen (1991) and Mowday *et al.* (1982) write that a person’s commitment to such standards is likely to alter and increase one’s affective commitment to the organization over time.

Some researchers (Boezeman and Ellemers, 2007; van Vuuren *et al.*, 2008) question the relevance of every part of Meyer and Allen’s (1991) model of commitment to volunteerism, with the primary argument based on a lack of economic incentives. However, economic incentives may be too narrow of a lens. Briggs *et al.* (2010) discuss other forms of non-financial benefits that volunteers seek and receive. This argument definitely manifested itself as themes developed surrounding what motivated participants to volunteer. *What are the non-financial benefits, if any, that our volunteers seek?*

#### 2.3.4 *What is the Impact of Volunteer Commitment?*

As Chacón *et al.* point out, organizational commitment has been notably investigated and researched within Organizational Psychology. Yet, they argue that organizational commitment has been overlooked in the social and community research

areas (2007). Citing Mowday, Steers, and Porter's definition, Chacón *et al.* highlight that organizational commitment is the effort one has toward the identification to and involvement with an organization. It also consists of the level that individuals believe and accept the organization's values and goals (citing 1979 in 2007, p. 629). For this project, I consider organizational commitment important when I also combine Montero's (2004) findings. She emphasizes that commitment levels will often regulate participation levels. As organizational commitment increases, I could expect volunteers' participation levels to also increase.

According to McBey *et al.*, volunteer commitment theories share most of the organizational commitment theory elements anyway. However, one difference between paid employees and volunteers is that volunteers do not receive tangible incentives. As a result, volunteers' commitment is more likely influenced by their perception of organizational support (POS) than that of employees (2017). Another non-financial incentive and an influence on volunteers' commitment is empowerment (Briggs *et al.*, 2010; Menon, 1999). Schneider and George argue how empowerment has a significant impact on commitment as well as satisfaction (2011). Menon believes commitment is fostered through empowerment because it provides meaningful experiences, including (1) goal internalization, (2) perceived control, and (3) perceived competence (1999, p 161). When paid leadership change occurs, I believe that each of these experiences has the ability to become more prominent. *But, do they? How do volunteers view goal internalization, their perceived control, and their perceived competence? Does promoting these meaningful experiences help volunteers manage the non-profit? Are these management practices that will develop organizational commitment?*

I like Brickman's language when he argues that commitment is what influences an individual to decide whether or not to continue when he or she is faced with struggles or faced with tempting alternatives (1987). This could be one reason that Valéau *et al.* found that volunteers' commitment to organizations is linked to turnover just as much as paid employees. As a result, the researchers argue for management practices to develop such organizational commitment (2013). To reduce volunteer turnover, Chacón *et al.* (2007) build their argument that commitment is foundational for individuals to volunteer long-term. Yet, Chacón *et al.* believe that volunteer commitment is only one part of the solution. At some point, volunteers transition to a *higher level of*

*participation*. Using the Role Identity Model, they argue that this is where individuals begin to internalize themselves as volunteers, leaders, and so on. And at this point, sustained volunteerism occurs (2007). *What happens when a volunteer's identity is broken? How does a volunteer's identity in their faith obstruct, if any, the ability for individuals to identify as volunteers?*

Lastly, Farmer and Fedor (1999) also write how volunteers and paid employees often have different incentives. These differences often lead to the belief that volunteers have a higher degree of commitment to the organization than their paid employed counterparts. Van Vuren *et al.* say that one explanation is that volunteers believe that they value the organization's mission more than paid employees (2008). However, as discussed in volunteer attachment and engagement, some researchers (Brudney, 1993; Brudney, 2011; Kang, 2019) have shown that volunteers can easily disengage from participating and are often more attached to the community rather than attached to the overall organization. Since volunteers may be more attached to the community, *how does the leader's leaving influence a volunteer's commitment? Are they more committed to the organization because they experience their actions as having a bigger impact? Or because of the stresses of change, does fatigue and exhaustion promote volunteers to become less committed?*

### *2.3.5 Are Motivated and Committed Volunteers' Always Engaged?*

Work engagement is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. At its essence, some researchers (Bakker *et al.*, 2008; Vecina, 2012) believe that work engagement is individuals working on a task, or tasks, which are fulfilling. Bakker *et al.* (2008) expand on each of these by describing:

- Vigor as a commitment to hard work, energy, and resilience
- Dedication as enthusiasm, involvement, and pride
- Absorption as focused and an overall-well-being during work

Before the literature review, I had considered motivation as a 'catch all' phrase that would have included engagement. However, as Alfes *et al.* point out, engagement is an individual characteristic that should not be confused with other characteristics, such as motivation or commitment. That said, engagement is a positive precursor to being

motivated, and motivation is a positive precursor to commitment (2016). Additionally, a person can be engaged with their work but still have a high chance of quitting because of other stressors, such as burnout (Hallberg and Schaufeli, 2006). Volunteer engagement follows similar patterns. A volunteer can be highly engaged, or fulfilled, with their work but still are considering quitting because of outside factors (Vecina *et al.*, 2012). Volunteer engagement can also be haphazard. According to Ragsdell (2013), volunteers can engage, disengage, and, even, reengage arbitrarily.

I believe Ragsdell's (2013) position summarizes why volunteer engagement is critical to this project. Despite my own personal experiences which are discussed later, I held the assumption that an individual who was disengaged was also an uncommitted individual. However, McAllum (2018) writes otherwise and shows that the issue is much more complex. For example, one possible indicator of disengaging is volunteers becoming jaded and then emotionally detached (McAllum, 2018). As McAllum (2018) points out, volunteers can also be overwhelmed with overall tasks or exhausted which can lead to volunteers disengaging. As a result, I believe asking, *what makes our volunteers vigorous, dedicated, and absorbed by their volunteering work?* But on the other side, *what makes them disengaged and exhausted? How does the organization alleviate stress so engagement may flourish? What does the organization do that increases stress?*

#### *2.3.6 How Does Volunteer Attachment Fit into Volunteers Attempting to Manage a Non-profit?*

Attachment theory asserts that people will secure or attach themselves to others' needs and pains and will spend their resources, such as time and energy, to assist them. However, some people will attempt to maintain independence and avoid attachment entirely or based on particular terms (Bowlby, 1969; Bowlby, 1982; Wilson, 2012). In the context of volunteers, the greater a volunteer's attachment avoidance, the lower their participation within the organization (Erez *et al.*, 2008). Additionally, even when volunteers have lower attachment avoidance, they still may not easily attach to formal organizations (Wilson, 2012). Hustinx and Handy argue that the difficulty of organizational attachment is linked to individualism. As a result, volunteers may strongly attach to a community or cause rather than an organization. However, if they

are attached to a cause or community, volunteers may move between organization and organization to serve that same community and cause.

I believe that volunteer attachment fits into this research because it is another lens to understand other volunteers and another tool to understand how to manage and interact with other volunteers. Additionally, volunteer motivations are associated with volunteer attachment. As discussed, people can attach to a wide range of items, such as a mission, an organization, a purpose, or even a person. As volunteers are attaching, volunteer motivations often fuel such attachment (Bassous, 2015; Hustinx and Handy, 2009; Yeung, 2004). Ultimately, volunteers are likely to ask, *what does it actually mean to me to volunteer* (Yeung, 2004).

By asking this question to participants within this thesis, *what does it mean to them to volunteer*, their stories may give meaning to some of the identities of our volunteers. Additionally, Weenink and Bridgman (2017) argue that volunteers' motivations can be understood through a socially negotiated process. Through this negotiating process, volunteers give meaning to their motives. *What range of motives do our volunteers have? What have volunteers socially negotiated?*

As I wrote previously, I now no longer believe that attachment is some ultimate goal. However, even as the research focus shifted away from managing volunteers and towards attending to volunteers, attachment seems relevant. I believe that attachment literature still leads me to ask: *What are volunteers attached to? Is there a path to reshape the volunteers' attachment? Is it even important to reshape what a volunteer is attached to? How does 'what volunteers attach to' impact how volunteers will continue to support the group after a paid leader leaves? How does attachment change when a leader is ultimately rehired? Are we attending to the detaching and reattachment process? Is it easier for us to recruit volunteers that attach to short-term causes or long-term causes? What are the potential long-term effects of this if volunteers are only attached to short-term causes? How does this affect volunteers attempting to lead when the leader leaves the organization?*

## **2.4 Volunteers' Duration of Service**

### *2.4.1 The Importance to the Project*

As I considered the initial research question and *how volunteers could manage the*

*non-profit*, I held the belief that having reliable, motivated, and engaged volunteers who were willing to commit long-term to the organization made managing the non-profit much simpler. Perhaps ignorantly, I wondered whether recruiting and supporting people who are willing to volunteer for ten years, twenty years, or even longer be one solution? As I will show in later chapters, and not surprisingly, the project is more complex than this notion. However, even though it may look much different than I originally envisioned, volunteers' duration of service still has merit. In some regards, volunteers' duration of service is a litmus test to how attentive we are of volunteers and their needs.

As Chacón *et al.* (2007) outline, there are two important questions for organizations that are specific to volunteerism. The first question asks, *how does the organization recruit volunteers*. The second question asks, *when we have volunteers, how do we keep them long-term*. The latter question can be critical as volunteer stability is not a certainty as studies highlight that the first-year drop-out rate can be between 35 percent – 40 percent (cited Dávila in Chacón *et al.*, 2003, 2007). Chacón *et al.* (2007) and Omoto and Snyder (1995) both write that this high first-year drop-out rate still occurs in spite of the fact that individuals plan to volunteer long-term. They write how the decision to volunteer is usually not spontaneous as it is a planned, long-term behavior.

Yet, Omoto and Snyder write how volunteerism is dynamic (1995), and Chacón *et al.* write how the driving forces behind whether individuals volunteer after a year or even after ten years are continuously changing. (2007). The very essence of volunteering impacts volunteers' self-concepts and motivations. One reason is that volunteers initially agree to help because of external factors from the organization. However, over time, internal factors within the organization often become influential (Chacón *et al.*, 2007; Clary *et al.*, 1998; Omoto and Snyder, 1995), such as factors that I highlighted previously in *organizations impact on volunteers*.

With these two different time periods (i.e., initial volunteering period and long-term volunteering period), Chacón *et al.* (2007) recommend first to consider the influence of the Functional Model to understand the initial volunteering phase and volunteers' initial motivations. However, after individuals have volunteered longer, Chacón *et al.* (2007) argue that motivation transitions toward commitment. As a result, they recommend the



Role Identity Model to understand sustained volunteerism over a longer duration of service. Before the data collection phases, I considered Chacon *et al.*'s (2007) position important because I thought volunteers understanding how volunteers are motivated was critical to helping us manage the non-profit. However, as the themes developed within the data, I transitioned to believing that while motivation was an important topic Chacon *et al.*'s (2007) arguments were beyond the scope of the project. I thought that I was losing the project's focus. However, Hector's conversation, as will be shown in later chapters, made me realize that the importance lays somewhere in the middle of these extremes, so I have preserved it within this literature review.

#### 2.4.2 *Classes of Volunteers*

Chacón *et al.*'s (2007) two influencers of volunteers' duration of service lead me to reflect on the different classes of volunteers. The literature review seemed to highlight how different volunteers hold different characteristics. Historically, I saw our organization as having three types of volunteers that classified as:

- Type 1 - *The Core*: those who have experienced multi-leader change cycles
- Type 2 - *The Cautious*: those who have experienced a partial cycle of either volunteering the entire time with a paid leader or the entire time without a paid leader
- Type 3 - *The Energized*: those who see change, see the needs, and are energized to volunteer

My project was initially and primarily focused on *The Core* since I considered this group as the collection that manages the organization when the leader leaves. However, the stories and empirical data from the volunteers lead to a significant theme and reshaped these groups.

Before that shift, literature had contributed to several new thoughts and questions: *Should I expand who will participate in the data collection process. Can role identity help provide sustainable volunteer stability through multiple change cycles?* For instance, it seems that if none of *The Cautious* become part of *The Core*, then it may have more to do with Role Identify than motivation. Though these concepts are intertwined, Chacón *et al.* highlight how these differences can be missed (2007).

As I moved toward data collection, I will be asking, *how can I listen to participants' stories to help me understand when and how Role Identity begins to influence volunteers? Would focusing on individual role identity lead to greater volunteer stability?* Also, as stated above, when the leader leaves the organization or a new leader is hired, an individual's motivation that initially led them to volunteer may change, therefore, affecting their motivation (Clary and Snyder, 1999). *The Cautious* may have been motivated because of the previous leader. When the paid leader leaves, *how can volunteers recognize those individuals and better understand what is driving them to volunteer, so we can help create a new agreed-upon social contract*, such as is highlighted by Farmer and Fedor (1999) and Vantilborgh and Van Puyvelde (2018).

## **2.5 The Reshaping of My Perspective of Volunteer Management**

When the paid leader leaves the organization, volunteers must step in to fill the temporary gap. However, from my perspective, the temporariness of this gap can be vast and seem more permanent than temporary. For instance, this gap within our organization usually exists for approximately eighteen months. When the paid leader is hired, he is likely to remain with the organization for usually three years (occasionally as long as five years) before another turnover cycle starts again. As the project looks toward organizational action, the literature review offered several ideas on how my colleagues and I could manage the non-profit without a paid staff leader. Many ideas that the literature review generated seemed to lose importance once I began to listen to the volunteers' stories. For example, some ideas included (1) implementing *best practices* within volunteering management theories, such as in Traeger and Alfes (2019), or (2) focusing on a consistent systemic structure that newly hired paid leaders could easily enter and exit without much disruption. The degree of structural centralization or decentralization, as I looked to Bozeman (1987), Dalton *et al.* (1980), Donaldson (2001), and Ouchi (1977), could be negotiated among volunteers and volunteer managers. Yet, as I listened to volunteers and reflected upon my volunteering practice, (please see the following chapters for details), these ideas seemed convoluted. I was left with something simpler. Volunteers needed to be cared for and attended to. Potential tools, such as role development and role redevelopment, could be important to help us be attentive. Yes, these tools could help us manage the non-profit (Kramer and Danielson, 2016). But, those tools could do so much more.

### 2.5.1 *The Importance of Role Development*

Kramer and Danielson (2016) write about the importance of assimilation in role development. Citing McPhee and Zaug (in Kramer and Danielson, 2000, 2016), the authors define assimilation as the process that roles are developed and learned. Assimilation requires negotiating and sense-making between existing and new members as new and, potentially, old roles develop. Kramer and Danielson (2016) highlight role development that help people begin to individualize their roles. Without adequate role development, Iverson (2013) argues that this can lead to higher volunteer turnover.

However, this process included both *role-taking* and *role-making*. The former is where members adapt to the role expectations that were described, and the latter is where members communicate their expectations of their role to other members (Kramer and Danielson (2016). Additionally, members can personalize their roles by shaping, molding, and redefining their duties (Kramer and Danielson, 2016). However, as Kramer highlights, role development for volunteers could be different than role development for paid employees. Volunteers usually commit to certain roles temporarily and usually have other life commitments that they need to manage (2002). Kramer's (2002) position helped inform a theme that emerges later in the empirical chapters when I define new classes of volunteers. This literature also led me to consider *does our organization has an environment for role-taking and role-making?*

Kramer and Danielson also argue that role development is an ongoing process. Especially during periods of organizational changes, they argue that it is important for volunteers to explore how roles are re-shaped, as well as to explore how volunteers respond to such changes (2016). This argument seems to echo in some of the volunteers' stories later on. Because if individuals struggle to make sense of the change, negotiate new roles, or cannot adapt, Kramer (2011) writes how volunteers will lose commitment and likely quit volunteering. I have often held the belief that our organization just needs people to complete tasks, and that we lack sufficient volunteers. If true, *how does that belief impact role development and role re-development?* And if we are short volunteers or stretched too thinly *when role development occurs, has organizational change stifled re-development? From whom and where do volunteers*

*renegotiate new roles?*

### *2.5.2 Without Redevelopment, We Face Death and Dying but Likely Fail to reach Rebirth*

Kramer and Danielson's (2016) position for role redevelopment is a practical point of view as I consider what volunteers may need during organizational change events. While other actions are likely to exist, as will be shown later, the combination of literature and data has narrowed my focus on development and redevelopment. From a broader point of view though, I will describe redevelopment as rebirth in this section.

Additionally, like redevelopment that I referenced above, the literature below emerged only after my first set of interviews. As I will describe in more detail in the following chapters, I could not have anticipated the impact that volunteers' stories would have on me. I sought to understand *what motivated some volunteers and questioned why I perceived them to be so committed*. Their stories varied widely though. From some volunteers, I heard something unexpected. I heard death. I heard dying. *Where was the rebirth? What does rebirth really even look like for volunteers?*

Zell (2003) examined the potential rebirth of university faculty members. Using Kubler-Ross's (1969) work on the five stages of the grief cycle, she applied those stages to organizational change events. While Zell's (2003) intention was to use the grief cycle to better understand an individual's resistance to change, I plan to examine it through the lens of redevelopment. Or better yet, I plan to ponder what if there is a lack of redevelopment. The five stages that Zell (2003) incorporates include (1) denial (2) anger (3) bargaining (4) depression, and (5) acceptance.

After interviewing the progression of forty faculty members after change initiatives, Zell (2003) showed that the majority of faculty members who reached the acceptance stage had not reached this stage after nineteen - twenty-four months. And at the thirteen - eighteen-month stage, most members were either in the bargaining stage or depression stage. Firstly, I find Zell's (2003) findings are highly relevant because our organization does not usually hire someone for around 18 months. Second, I question *what if happens if other changes continue to occur? Can our volunteers ever truly find acceptance? What if there is a lack of bargaining?* When I look at redevelopment (Kramer and Danielson, 2016), there must be sense-making and renegotiating of roles. But if

volunteers lack bargaining, *what is the outcome? Will there be a rebirth for those volunteers?*

## 2.6 Chapter Summary

In the preceding literature review, I attempted to outline volunteerism literature with a focus on how the literature has contributed to my thinking regarding the research problem and what questions were raised that will need to be answered. This process is to support what action that will ultimately occur.

However, like other moments of this project, the literature review was an emerged process. The literature directly influenced how I initially approached the first stages of data collection, and the emerged data directly influenced a deeper dive into particular parts of the literature. This process continued as the literature and the data continued to shape and reshape each other and later research stages.

Even though the initial focus on the research problem is specific to asking how volunteers should manage a nonprofit through the turnover of our paid, full-time leader, there are many underlying theories that are important to understand. I attempted to show and connect such literature to how the research problem was also changing, such as (1) the importance of volunteers, the human beings, to the organization (Lewig *et al.*, 2007; Wilson, 2012) and the impact that the organization can have on volunteerism (2) how volunteer motivation and commitment (Hustinx and Handy, 2009; McBey *et al.*, 2017; Meyer and Allen, 1991; Yeung, 2004) provide foundational support on how volunteers can lead other volunteers (Cnaan and Cascio, 1998; Fisher and Cole, 1993; Kreutzer and Jäger; Millette and Gagné, 2008) (3) the role that redevelopment can play in volunteer management (Kramer and Danielson, 2016) (4) and a discussion about the importance of rebirth in organizational change. The first part of the literature chapter, though still relevant, likely has a tone on managing the volunteers. However, by the end of the literature chapter, the tone began to shift toward the volunteers, as individuals.

As the following chapters will show in more detail, the responses to many of the questions raised in this chapter outline the evidence that shifted my focus. While chapter four emphasizes the responses to these questions by using *themes*, chapter five complements those emerged themes by rediscussing each to show how I was becoming part of the research myself. And in chapter six, I show how it is no longer the managing

that is important to this thesis but the attending that has become the aspiration.

## Chapter 3 – Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

This research thesis' initial purpose is to examine *how do volunteers manage a nonprofit through a leadership transition*. However, the intent is more than exploration. My primary goal is for volunteers to discuss how leadership transitions influence their volunteering practice and then seek action that will positively influence volunteerism within our organization. As a volunteer myself, self-inquiry was a critical component of this project. As I heard new perspectives, they impacted how I saw volunteerism, the organization, and my practice. So much so, I ultimately shifted the research focus to asking *how can volunteers be attended to*. As I show within this thesis, the research design not only allowed for this focus shift but supported this shift.

A key requirement within this project is to incorporate action research. Therefore, I will begin this chapter by discussing how action research influenced the research design and my journey for actionable knowledge. Next, I will outline the research strategy implemented within this thesis and discuss the reasoning for the chosen research path. The bulk of the research strategy is derived from the overall research design. As a result, I will outline and discuss the key tenants of the research design and how I positioned my project within this design. As discussed below, one theme of my research design process is how I consider most research design facets as being part of a continuum rather than fitting into neat, isolated, individual boxes. This position may create a paradox for some people, but I will attempt to defend why such a paradox, or contradiction, does not exist to me. For example, when I discuss my methodological stance, rather than describe in detail the already well-debated differences, I will discuss how my methodological stance influenced the research design process, how my stance may seem contradictory, and how my stance impacted the design.

Once I discuss the foundation of this project's research design, I will transition into discussing the impact that the research design had on action research (as a response to action research's impact on the research design with which I will open this chapter). Action research can be an obtuse term at times. As Marshall points out, action research is not only an umbrella term but also a term that applies to a diversity of approaches

within each approach rooted in a diverse, rich, and distinct heritage (2016, p. 4). Action research also is emergent. Even though the research process may look straightforward in this chapter, it was anything but organized. Marshall argues that many people, especially as they pursue a degree, pretend to be more objective, linear, and rational (2016). I aim to be open, reflexive, and highlight the many successes and struggles I have had throughout this process. My journey was non-linear. I was rational at times but irrational at other times, and I regularly found myself judging participants' comments at the beginning of the project rather than seeking knowledge.

So, the reality is that I wrestled with the research question throughout this entire project. I fought it throughout the literature review process when I was searching for neatness and answers to my question. Because of this attempted coercion, I struggled with fitting the question into the literature '*the way that I wanted it to fit*' and struggled accepting how literature influenced the framing of the question. As I moved through the research design and data collection phases, narratives and knowledge emerged that further shifted my focus. One important and impactful shift from this process is that *first-person action research* (Marshall, 2016) played a much greater role. As a result, this major shift will heavily influence the following chapters. But ultimately, I plan to show below how I began my research with *narrative inquiry* to collect data, how *action inquiry* shaped *first-person* and *second-person* action research, and how I borrowed from the autoethnography genre. On one hand, this seems ambitious. Though on the other hand, it seems as simple as *just telling my research journey*. My approach may be challenging to many political boundaries as to what is acceptable (Marshall, 2016). In response to potential challenging, I will end the chapter by further grounding the research's richness and the fieldwork by discussing the quality and rigor, the analysis and interpretation of the data, the generation and capturing of the data, and the research participants. I will then conclude this chapter by reflecting on this entire process.

### **3.2 Action Research Impact on the Research Design**

As Marshall points out, action research is often applied to a diverse range of approaches. Based on one's research paradigm, researchers and authors are likely to focus on different underpinnings and boundaries within action research. As a result, one's research paradigm is critical and is a broad influencer (2016). Looking back to



when I began this project, I would now argue that my research paradigm was somewhat supposititious. I do not believe that my methodological position, which I will later briefly touch on, changed much in this project. However, I believe my lack of experience collecting data and lack of using research approaches led to a bias towards a research paradigm of comfortability. I wanted to force action research cycles, such as presented by Coghlan and Brannick (2013), that follow the scripted step of constructing, planning, action, and evaluation. Scripted steps seemed comfortable to me, but they would have also been coerced in this case. *If one's research paradigm is critical, how did this conflict between the desire for coercion and having a fragile research paradigm impact the project?*

It, meaning the conflict, led to an emergent and explorative project. With the encouragement and support of my adviser, I was able to construct a more firm and stable research paradigm. One facet of this paradigm is a focus on the questions rather than on methods. To consider, *what method or approach will help provide the best data at the moment?* I embraced pluralism (Midgley, 2011). As a result, I believe that action research impacted everything but not so neatly as I had initially planned. One moment that my research paradigm began to become more defined is when I read Marshall. She wrote that action research's core characteristics create an environment where the action research approach encourages a creative and interactive process for the researchers' specific inquiry (Marshall, 2016, p. 4-5). I was moving in a creative and interactive process; however, it seemed wrong. It seemed to break the rules. But, as I hope to show in the following chapters, this process also leads to richer inquiry. Though, rather than a pure action research thesis, it is important to highlight that this thesis is one of emergent inquiry that is influenced by action research, leaning into action research. As a result, the thesis does not include planned change but later highlights emergent change.

*What core characteristics resonated with me then?* For my initial research question, *how do volunteers manage a nonprofit through a leadership transition*, I highlighted and then expanded upon the following core characteristics (Marshall, 2016, p. 4) of action research that I consider relevant to my research design:

- focused on knowledge in and for practice

- has an interest to encourage change through engagement and action
- usually incorporates cycles of action and reflection
- aware of issues of power
- sensitive to context and to timing

I believe that the context and timing are critical core characteristics of this thesis. After the typically fifteen to eighteen-month period of being without a paid leader, the organization hired a full-time compensated leader. This hire occurred at the onset of the data collection phase. Even though the new leader acknowledges that his role has a relatively high turnover rate and verbally supports my thesis' foundational intention, beginning conversations about his future departure can be difficult. I assume that the participating volunteers will likely want the new leader to feel supported and likely do not want the new leader to get the impression that we are undermining his authority. This definitely describes my emotions as I consider the initial interviews. If the sensitivity of the context and timing is ignored, the data collection process could be impaired from the beginning.

This context and timing alone create an interesting dynamic of power. As has occurred throughout the organization's history, volunteers have led after a paid leader departs. However, once a full-time leader is hired again, volunteers somewhat step aside into a support role. Within the timing of this project, volunteers are in the process of stepping back in such a support role. Some volunteers are stepping back into previous support roles. Others are stepping back into new support roles. This transition could create conversations that could strain power dynamics. Discussing past leaders and potential future leaders could seem awkward. However, I believe that focusing attention on any transitional conflict will help me better understand the participants' stories, frame their narratives, and follow up with better-probing questions.

As can be seen, engagement, action, and reflection will be critical to gain knowledge and impact practice. The project's aim is then to create actionable knowledge that supports management practices by:

(1) mapping the terrain where inquiry will focus, among other things, on the context and situation, and will seek to discover what actions will be necessary.

And then (2) attempt to persuade the organization that the discovered ideas and actions will positively impact *how volunteers manage the nonprofit through a leadership transition*. The project will document the responses to these discovered ideas. And in chapter six as I document the responses, I also show what the thesis ultimately became about and how the thesis evolved from the initial research focus to the final research focus.

Essentially, the research design is built to encourage change through engagement and action. Rather than proving an idea or *getting the right* answer, I aim to encounter tensions and dilemmas, remain in and reflect upon those tensions and dilemmas, and then explore those tensions and dilemmas. By encouraging this type of engagement, the goal is to allow immersion to magnify learning (Marshall, 2016, p. 7). But ultimately, Marshall argues that showing such inquiry in rich and deep action helps the readers judge the quality of the engagement and attempted experiments (2016, p. 7). For this project, I believe rich action emerged at several levels, such as when researching (discussed in chapter four), within my personal volunteering practice (discussed in chapter five), and when I attempted to sell the research outcomes to organizational members (discussed chapter six).

Lastly, but certainly not least, the research design must include the core characteristic of knowledge in and for practice. Marshall reminds researchers who attempt to contribute to change to be vigilant against becoming an advocate. If advocacy takes over, Marshall argues that learning and the systematic impact can be diminished. To combat this pitfall, I will incorporate Marshall's suggestion by asking, *In what ways is "this" inquiry* (2016, p. 5-6), while also maintaining a focus on actionable knowledge. At first, I found this practice difficult because I felt attached to *ideas* and *positions* that materialized from inquiry. However, as my researcher adviser continued to promote deeper inquiry, I slowly detached from trying to 'own' certain *ideas* and *positions*. I am hopeful that this is evident as I break down the research design in the sections below.

### **3.3 Actionable Knowledge**

Sexton and Lu write that actionable knowledge is pluralist in nature (2009), and it should meet the needs of not only the scientific community but also the organization

(Alder *et al.*, 2004; Sexton and Lu, 2009). Additionally, actionable knowledge should develop professional practices by demanding active participation, which aims to transform the participants within the research context (Crawford, 1995; Sexton and Lu, 2009). Sexton and Lu also say that actionable knowledge should then “leverage and combine both research-based knowledge and experience-based knowledge” (2009, p. 686).

To achieve such leverage to gain actionable knowledge, I intended to include two or three cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. This planned cycle count was somewhat arbitrary though. It was more dependent upon *‘how many cycles are appropriate for a thesis,’* such as mentioned by Zuber-Skerritt and Perry (2002), rather than considering what my research question might need. However, Coghlan (2019) seems to highlight how action research cycles are more nuanced than these *‘two or three cycles’* that I initially envisioned. He outlines how action research cycles can operate simultaneously while also having different time spans. Using the multiple hands on a clock as an illustration, Coghlan writes how a large complex project that takes years to complete could be represented by the twelve hours on the clock. Each hour could be a particular phase or cycle. Yet, inside each ‘hourly’ cycle are smaller cycles represented by the minute hand. And each ‘minute’ cycle is comprised of smaller cycles represented by the second hand (2019, p. 11-12). Along with Marshall’s (2016) and Torbert and Taylor’s (2008) positions that I expand upon in section 3.5, Coghlan’s (2019) illustration of the clock hands promoted freedom for me to seek actionable knowledge through inquiry. To complement these frameworks, I relied upon Zuber-Skerritt and Perry’s (2002) work on integrating action research into thesis writing. Zuber-Skerritt and Perry (2002) segregate action research cycles into two categories: (1) core action research cycles and (2) thesis action research cycles. As a result, this thesis has incorporated both Coghlan’s (2019) and Zuber-Skerritt and Perry’s (2002) perspective. See Figure 6 in Appendix 4. Though, again, planned change was absent from this thesis.

Furthermore, as shown in figure 9 in Appendix 4, a reflection cycle occurs throughout each step of the core action research cycle. According to Argyris (2003), this reflection cycle that occurs throughout each step is critical to developing actionable knowledge. Argyris underscores that actionable knowledge is not “policies, plans, and strategies” (2003, p. 447). Instead, it is the knowledge that individuals can effectively

apply to arrive at their intended destination (Argyris, 2003). Actionable knowledge is foundational to Lewin's belief that individuals do not genuinely understand something until they try to change it (cited in Argyris, 2003).

The goal is for the data collected to provide support for how volunteers operate within and manage our organization. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the organization also influences volunteers, so one goal is to also collect data that will inform the organization how to better engage with volunteer leaders. And lastly, as the individual researcher who is stimulating change, my goal is to better understand my practice so that I can act to improve it.

Argyris also argues that two dominant mindsets exist in the world of action, (1) a productive mindset (2) and a defensive mindset. The first mindset seeks valid knowledge through transparency and testing. The second mindset instead seeks to protect the actions, or community, from a threat or embarrassment. In this latter mindset, testing is not about knowledge but protection (2004, p. 509). I believe that I had to strive for a productive mindset in this project. I noticed that when I listened to different stories, I had to wrestle with a defensive mindset. I caught myself questioning a volunteer's lived-experience as if it were my lived-experience. A couple of times, I had to put the transcripts away and forget about them for several weeks to distance myself from a dismissive attitude. When I returned, I was often able to read the stories with a more productive mindset which invariably led to gaining new insights about my fellow volunteers as well as new insights about myself.

An example of conflict between a productive and defensive mindset was when Leia talked about how "cliques" can be a problem within our organization. When I first heard Leia speaking about cliques, I immediately thought, "while you are the one who is often viewed as being at the center of this problem." Upon returning to the transcripts after several weeks, I noticed something deeper present within her experiences. As a theme that I will discuss later, I saw the influence of parental and non-parental volunteers. For actionable knowledge to emerge, I had to practice a productive mindset (Argyris, 2004) which, as I stated previously, relied on asking myself, *in what ways is "this" inquiry* (Marshall, 2016, p. 5-6).

### 3.4 Research Design

#### 3.4.1 Overview

Like Gorard, I considered the research design in this project more than restrictive, blind steps that should be rigidly followed throughout one's research process (2010). Rather, I have examined and explored the project's research design through the lens that it is nothing more than a tool. This tool will help arrange the research so that sufficient evidence is generated and organized to answer the research question. Several critical tenets of the research design will include (1) mode of knowledge (2) the role of the researcher (3) methodological stances (4) the breadth or depth of the research (5) primary research methods, and (6) ethical considerations (Fisher *et al.*, 2010, p. 42).

Though I consider research design a powerful tool, I also believe it loses much power when one places either too little or too much emphasis upon it. It is a balance. As Gorard (2010) outlines, considering research design early helps the researcher become aware of potential pitfalls and will likely simplify later analysis that will eventually aid meaningful conclusions. However, even in the name of rigor, the research ought not to force one's research into pre-existing design. If he or she does so, the project becomes restrictive and confined.

As a result, I have continuously needed to remind myself that my emphasis should not be on *conducting my research* but rather on *what type of research is appropriate to answer my research question given my circumstances* (Hakim, 2000). When I considered this latter question, it allowed me to draw upon narrative inquiry, action inquiry, *first-person* action research, and autoethnography. As will be shown, each of these played an important role within this project. Essentially, the research design will aid data gathering and analysis to support the research claims (Gorard, 2010). Next, I will discuss each tenant of the research design as it influenced this project.

#### 3.4.2 Modes of Knowledge

Fisher *et al.* (2010) write that each mode of knowledge uses a different language and each one focuses on a different type of knowledge. For example, Mode 1 is disciplinary knowledge and focuses on the theoretical. Mode 2 is the technical rational knowledge and uses the practical and real-life situations. It is usually viewed as the opposite of Mode 1 knowledge. Mode 3 is the dispositional and transdisciplinary

knowledge, and Mode 4 is the critical knowledge. These latter two modes attempt to shift the focus of knowledge. Mode 3 focuses on the individual and on how he or she can gain additional knowledge and skills. Mode 3 can use either practical experiences or theoretical knowledge in their pursuit. Mode 4 attempts to produce moral and political critique and is typically used by academics (2010, p. 43-44).

The debates and tensions of whether management research ought to be primarily focused on academic, practice, or a mix of both are well documented (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007; Rynes *et al.*, 2001; Van de Ven and Johnson, 2006; Van de Ven, 2007). On one extreme of the debate, some academic researchers argue that the purpose of their research aims for scientific knowledge advancement with no responsibility to practice, such as in Mode 1 or Mode 4. However, evidence exists that such knowledge is not necessarily adequately advancing. On the other extreme, practitioners argue that academic research is often irrelevant for solving practical problems, such as Mode 2. However, critics argue other practitioners do not attempt to position their practices into theory, and as a result, organizations are not changing, adapting, or learning quickly enough (Van de Ven, 2007).

Rather than continue to expand upon the merits of each side of this debate, like in Van de Ven (2007), I agree with Fisher *et al.* that such division ought to be abolished and that engagement ought to be at the forefront (2010, p. 44). As a result, the research design for this project will attempt to straddle both worlds in my pursuit of being a pracademic (Posner, 2009). The project's goal then is for the mode of knowledge to incorporate both understanding and action, theoretical and practical (Fisher *et al.*, 2010). Though not mutually exclusive, volunteerism knowledge gained within this project likely leans toward *understanding*, and the knowledge impacting my personal practice and the practice of other volunteers' likely leans toward *action*. In seeking this balance, I will focus on how I engage the research.

#### ***3.4.2.a Level of Engagement***

Since my goal within this research is that engagement be at the forefront, defining the envisioned level of engagement will better guide my research (Fisher *et al.*, 2010). Fisher *et al.* categorize research engagement into five levels: (1) Ivory Tower (2) Evaluation (3) Engaged (4) Participant (5) Seeking Justice (2010, p. 45-48). These

levels are built upon Gibbons *et al.*'s (2004) and Scott *et al.*'s (2004) work on knowledge modes that were described above.

*Ivory Tower* research historically has focused on mode 1 knowledge. As a result, there is no connection between knowledge and action (Fisher *et al.*, 2010, p. 45), and it would not fit my pursuit of a pracademic. *Evaluation* research moves more toward a balance of knowledge and action. The participants can also influence the research. However, the researchers will act more independently so he or she can maintain greater objectivity (Fisher *et al.*, 2010, p. 45; Van De Ven, 2007). One of the research thesis' objectives is to research with participants rather than on participants (Heron and Reason, 2006). If the researcher is *Seeking Justice*, he or she is attempting to do more than just to change processes; instead, the researcher is trying to accomplish more extensive cultural and system changes. As a result, the researcher attempts to emphasize mode 4 knowledge that focuses on political or moral critique (Fisher *et al.*, 2010). Even though I am examining the system, I am not examining morality changes and therefore am not attempting to connect at the *Seeking Justice* level of engagement.

*Engaged* research is performed collaboratively, and it also attempts to link experiential knowledge with academic knowledge. However, even though research is collaborative, the researcher and participants may have different desires from one another. *Engaged* research can support both understanding and action but tends to often emphasize mode 1 knowledge over mode 2 knowledge (Fisher *et al.*, 2010). *Participant* research maintains the collaborative nature of *Engaged* research but has a greater focus on both the needs of the researcher and organization. As a result, mode 1 knowledge is deemphasized for mode 2 and mode 3 knowledge. Practical, local knowledge is generated from valuable sources, without disciplinary boundaries. The researcher and participants are also concerned with learning and reflection. They will draw on both experiences and theoretical knowledge (Fisher *et al.*, 2010, p. 43-46). Even though the primary level of engagement will be more *Participant* in nature, I think borrowing from *Engaged* research will also have benefits.

For example, to achieve feasibility within this thesis, I sought to temporarily maintain collaborative boundaries for the research to live within. This means that other volunteers will not have a direct influence on other dialogs with other volunteers. The



second example is how I will seek to *test the plausibility* of the research with the organization. While the aim will be participatory, the project's goal should not be reshaped by an executive's desire for the project to look different. As a result, rather than an either-or scenario, the research design will maintain a continuum between *Engaged* research and *Participant* research.

### 3.4.3 Researchers Role

Fisher *et al.* write how the researcher's role is often dictated by two characteristics: (1) visibility (2) degree of involvement (2007). With these two characteristics, four common roles emerge. For example, if the researcher is invisible and not involved, the researchers take *the fly on the wall* role. However, if the researcher is invisible and involved, he or she acts more like a spy or *covert participant observer*. Because I will be visible, my role will be dictated based on my level of involvement within the organization. Having a historically high degree of involvement, I consider myself a *privileged observer*. This role is also called the *judge*. Even though each role has advantages and disadvantages, this latter title seems to exacerbate the disadvantages of the *judge / privileged observer*. If the researcher was visible and not involved, often called the *academic / harmless drudge*, the lack of personal involvement can affect access, allowed time, and the organization's priority. However, in my case, the disadvantage can be magnified in how participants view me. If I were not careful, I could be viewed as the *judge*. Fisher *et al.* highlight that this view could lead participants to feel uneasy, annoyed by an appearance of power, and become restrictive in their dialog (2010, p. 48-49). Experientially, I knew this was a critical point for success. Because several participants have volunteered for decades, positioning my role as *privileged*, meaning honored but not having power, allowed but not entitled, is likely to lead participants to buy into a collaborative research environment.

As a result, organizational politics was an essential consideration (Coghlan, 2006). It especially framed how I initiated the first set of interviews. To distance myself from a potential *judge* mentality, I leveraged narrative inquiry and storytelling to seek authentic inquiry. Initially, I sensed all volunteers were somewhat uncomfortable speaking to me. Once I began asking about their story, I believe all of the volunteers quickly embraced speaking to me, not to a researcher. Most risk of being seen as *the*

*judge* disappeared. Additionally, since I have volunteered with several of the participants for such an extended period of time, I was able to rely on my prior experiences to modify inquiry to promote a safe environment.

For example, I was aware that some participants are willing to be open and revealing in small groups with the few people they trust. However, when in larger groups, they will remain reserved and distrusting. Some participants will be open when they feel that they are influential and meaningful to the dialog. They are usually always willing to give their perspective, but they may also subvert dialog if they sense they are being ignored. On the other hand, others are open no matter the circumstances, but they lose focus and aim on the current dialog, speak excessively, and prevent a balance of ideas and thoughts. However, because they go on tangents, they consistently create new, branching paths that no one has considered before. Rather than silencing this type of participant, I listened to him or her differently. This ultimately was incredibly beneficial as will be discussed in later chapters. From this experience, I believe another advantage of narrative interviews is that participants could '*just talk.*' Yes, I would probe for deeper understanding, but the participants could just share their point of view. There were times that participants told me stories that were completely removed from this project's objectives. Other times participants seem to be telling me a story that was unrelated but then connected their experiences back to the project's objectives. Ultimately, as I will touch on in the quality section later in this chapter, I relied on the idea of *significance* to support the research quality.

#### 3.4.4 Methodological Stance

Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, and Jackson argue how researchers think philosophical issues will impact their research design. The authors state that such *thinking*, or the lack thereof, may not be fatal to their research but will ultimately influence research quality (2012, p. 17). In this section, instead of outlining the ongoing philosophical debates, summarizing how the researcher's ontological and epistemological position influences the researcher's identity and research design (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, Jackson, 2012), and outlining how this project's research design was framed within that debate, I will instead follow Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, Jackson's (2012) recommendation. I will reflexively *think* about my position and how it will influence my research.

Creswell argues that we will bring particular beliefs and philosophical assumptions into our research (2013, p. 15). From an ontological perspective, my position lies between an internal realist and a relativist. I believe that there is a single truth. But at times, the truth is obscure and inaccessible. Other times though, the truth can be revealed. Yet, individually, I believe that we may still experience truth differently; therefore, our individual reality is often dependent upon our vantage point (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, and Jackson, 2012). Epistemologically speaking, I consider myself neither a positivist nor a constructionist but yet, perhaps, both. I define my position because the manner in which this continuous internal conflict resolves itself within this research thesis has been an intriguing process to me.

For example, as a result of my view, unconsciously, I initially desired to use a mixed-method approach incorporating both qualitative and quantitative frameworks. I believe one reason for this desire is that the chosen research methodology is greatly influenced by one's research paradigm (Creswell, 2013), so I initially wanted such a duality to be presented to reflect my own personal beliefs. Additionally, a mixed-method approach could have added to the thesis. Creswell and Creswell (2017) show how mixing methods and integrating data can provide a stronger understanding of the problem. Generally, incorporating a mixed method often draws on the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research while minimizes the limitations of each. Although, as Creswell and Creswell (2017) point out, combining methods also has challenges, such as difficulty in merging two different type of databases of data. Ultimately, I concluded that my desire to force both qualitative and quantitative frameworks into this project would have overlooked that "research methodologies are merely tools, instruments to be used to facilitate understanding" (Morse, 1991, p. 122).

And as I considered the questions, *what am I really asking within my research question*, and *what is important to the research question*, I concluded that such a dual methodological approach would only be motivated by attempting to make a statement about my research paradigm rather than to facilitate authentic understanding.

So beginning again, I started with the main research question, *how do volunteers manage a nonprofit through a leadership transition*. From this, the following forms of inquiry evolved:

- *Tell me about why you began volunteering.*
- *Please describe the problems that you encounter in your practice after a leader departs. What moments were most impactful to you?*
- *Tell me about some of your best moments after the leader departs the organization. Describe those opportunities and how they looked.*
- *Over time, I think problems and opportunities are likely to change. Can you tell me about how each changed in the past? What were you expecting, and why? How were you surprised, and why?*
- *Can you tell me about how you prepare for when the next leader is hired?*

It slowly became apparent that the individual volunteers were critical. *How are WE to move forward and manage the non-profit after the leader departed* became *How are YOU to move forward when the leader departs* and *How did YOUR role change and look different*. In the research design process, I came to believe that I needed richer data. I needed more than just how the volunteers' routine changed or how their practice was altered. As I understand how circumstances affected the volunteers as well as myself (both as a researcher and as a volunteer), it leads to more emergent research. As a result, as Creswell and Creswell point out, much of the data that will be generated will require interpretation (2017).

Axiologically speaking, such duality in my personal beliefs is the bedrock of my values. Creswell (2013) argues that my values will directly influence the research. While my values and beliefs shaped the thesis, as will be shown, the thesis also reciprocated and reshaped some of my values and beliefs. So much so that by chapter six, I question a long held theological belief of mine, something that I never would have expected.

Additionally, my values and beliefs include the stance that there is a single truth from a divine source. Yet, these values and beliefs ask who am I to believe that I can comprehend such truth. It is best summed up from the scripture of our faith when Isaiah proclaims, "Woe to me!" because he is just "a man" and was in the presence of *Truth* (Holy Bible, *n.d.*). As a result, truth, at times, may be inaccessible but searchable. And as we search, we may each find pieces of such truth, but other pieces may remain

obscure. Yet, we search.

One initial assumption based on my values was that everyone with the organization volunteered to serve the organization. As I describe later, that assumption was quickly shattered by a question of my thesis supervisor. However, other known values and biases continued to shape the study. For example, potentially the most significant included the sample of volunteers. In total, there were six volunteers interviewed. Five of those volunteers were interviewed twice. One of those volunteers was interviewed once. As I expand upon later, my biases shaped which data to focus on.

However, there were two other volunteers who met the volunteering threshold to participate in the interviews but who did not show interest in participating. Looking back, I likely did not want them to participate. We have never been confrontational with one another and are pleasant to each other. Yet, our personalities seem too often abrasive to each other. After following the request procedures legalistically with those two volunteers, I recall that I was happy that those volunteers did not respond or show interest to participate. *Did I present myself as friendly to those volunteers as to those volunteers who accepted the invitation?* I would like to believe so, but I am unsure. Either way, the lack of their presence directly influenced the amount of data that was gathered.

#### **3.4.4.a Let's Briefly Talk About Data Quality**

Creswell (2013) argues that quality research is derived from quality data, but quality data is determined by the 'fit' of the research method to the research question. My research question focuses on individual volunteers, on their lived experiences, not on management processes absent of the individual. As a result, the research methodology that was ultimately chosen lies within a qualitative framework. The generated data will require interpretation (Creswell and Creswell, 2017), but the 'fit' of the research question promoted this through seeking quality data and, therefore, quality research (Creswell, 2013).

If I had pursued a mixed-method approach, I believe that I would have likely lost my focus, meaning the volunteers themselves. I would have focused on the form of the research rather than the function of the research. This was one challenge that the research methods helped to overcome. First, *narrative inquiry* promoted a focus on the

volunteers and for me to be present. See chapter four for details. Next, *first-person inquiry* further challenged what I was focused on and what was ultimately important. See chapter five. So, in continuing to define what a pracademic looks like to me, I did not view positivism and constructionism as oppositional to one another. Rather, I take Onwuegbuzie's (2000) stance that such a view is false, and that positivism and constructionism exist on an epistemological continuum rather than in distinct boxes. This perspective encouraged the research approach to evolve as the research focus evolved throughout the data collection phases. It encouraged me to let go of preconceived ideas and rigidity in favor of *inquiry*. I will later discuss research quality in more depth later below.

#### 3.4.5 Breadth / Depth of Research

The research design is influenced by whether the researcher is attempting to gain a broad or in-depth understanding of a phenomenon. Depending upon the researcher's aim, different approaches and data collection methods are a better fit when appropriately matched. For example, random surveys may fit well if the researcher attempts to examine a phenomenon from a broader point of view. However, multiple open-ended interviews with a smaller group of participants may be a better fit for a more in-depth study (Fisher *et al.*, 2010). But as Fisher *et al.* (2010) point out, it would be wrong to connect particular data collection methods with this aim. Preferably, the data collection method can be constructed in a manner to fit the aim. For instance, observation can merely be used for preliminary work or become a significant research element.

Since my goal is to inquire about the volunteers' lived experiences, I am searching for a more profound perspective rather than a broader one. This will directly impact how particular research methods are incorporated into the researched design and how they will be constructed to collect the appropriate data. For example, I began data collection using a *Narrative Inquiry* approach (Kim, 2015). Because of the action modality chosen, I also complemented such data collection using *first-person*, and *second-person* inquiry (Marshall, 2016; Torbert, 2006) which will be defined and discussed later in this chapter. This path ultimately prompted me to dig deeper into my own *first-person* practice where I later leaned into the autoethnography approach

(Holman Jones *et al.*, 2016). This journey was heavily influenced by the research design's goal to seek depth over breadth, though each influence will be discussed more in greater detail. In the next section, I will expand on the primary research approach, *narrative inquiry*. Later, just as I previously discussed how action research impacted the research design, I will discuss the impact that the research design had on the action modalities. There, I show how *action inquiry* and *first-person action research* influenced this project, although it may currently look as if I 'threw in the kitchen sink' in the hopes to achieve depth. I do not believe that was the case. Rather, I believe that I can show how each interweaves into the other, so depth emerges. Given this goal, did I consider other approaches, such as phenomenological research? I will expand my discussion regarding the applied approaches as well as some related rejected approaches in the following section.

#### 3.4.6 Research Approach

As I start to discuss the research approach, I believe it is important to briefly reexamine the research site to expand upon why depth, rather than breadth, is my focus and how it influences the research approach. When I considered a research site, I had a choice between two different organizations that allowed access to action research. The first organization was where I was professionally employed. The second organization was where I had been volunteering for over ten years. I ultimately chose the second organization because I was most passionate about the reoccurring "problem."

As I considered what made me passionate about this particular problem, I was reminded of a comment that a longstanding executive leader, and friend, made to me. At the time of this dialog, I had been volunteering within the organization for approximately five years. We were beginning to start a second transition with a newly hired leader. The volunteers were excited. The students were excited. The newly hired leader was energized. It was a moment full of positive momentum. I would describe the night of our dialog as hopeful.

As the executive leader and I were standing on the edge of the festivities, we were just quietly observing all the dynamic changes. These changes seem to have occurred at a flip of a switch. I would say that he and I were just *taking a breath* as we had just endured a long and fatiguing period of volunteers leading without a paid leader. After

several moments, he said, “You know, when this has all come and gone [meaning the excitement and when the leader leaves again], you and I will still be here.” He was correct. Since that time, we have undergone several transitions. And each time, I think about his comment. I would not describe his comment as negative or demeaning. I made sense of his comment as a phrasing of commitment. “*We will be here.*”

Part of what makes me passionate about this particular problem is the individual volunteers that I shared my time with over the years. *What are their lived experiences? How did he or she move forward through the ups and downs of change?* My focus is on exploring the volunteer’s life. As a result, incorporating a narrative research approach will be an advantageous fit (Creswell, 2013) because the research will examine the lives of the participants within volunteerism, therefore, allowing me to focus the data collection on volunteers’ stories (Riessman, 2008). The narrative inquiry genre will be more autobiographical in nature (Kim, 2015). Though as Kim (2015) outlines, narrative inquiry does not need to identify a particular genre. By recognizing what type of data I will need to collect, identifying a narrative genre will help maintain focus and awareness throughout the data collection and writing process (Kim, 2015). It will also complement the action modalities that are later discussed.

Even though, there is a debate whether action research and narrative inquiry can coexist. For some people, this interrelationship is a contradiction and or, they argue that narrative inquiry is unique from action research. Even though it is not described this simply, it seems that these two genres of qualitative research are often portrayed as fitting into separate, neat boxes (Creswell *et al.*, 2007; Rosiek and Atkinson, 2005). But, I see a co-relationship where one another can harmonize in a special way. One key objective is to make myself as aware as possible of the many-layered narratives ongoing with the organization (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 70). Interviews will focus on the interviewees telling and retelling their stories. The actual timeline and count of the interviews are detailed in Appendix 5. The goal is for the narratives to have a deep interest in the participants (Josselson and Lieblich, 1995). Throughout this process, the aim is to experience a cycle of living, telling, retelling, and reliving (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). In many ways, I see parallels with the action research cycle: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. And ultimately, in later chapters, this process leads to me including my own perspective and giving my own voice.



### **3.4.6.a What About Other Approaches?**

While the previous section argued for the chosen research approaches in this project, the following will highlight several reasons for excluding other approaches. As Creswell points out, there are many qualitative approaches available to the researcher (2013, p. 7-11). Rather than examining the research question and research goals through the lens of the many possible approaches, I used the narrower lens of Creswell's (2013) five approaches as a guide.

As a result, I quickly eliminated a case study approach and a grounded theory approach because of the project's goals. For example, I did not have a specific bound case that I planned to examine specific to a time, e.g., case study (Creswell, 2013). The bounds of this project were emergent. I also did not aim to generate or discover a theory, e.g., grounded theory (Creswell, 2013). The research goals also did not include detailing the cultural interworking of our group, discussing how the group functions, and presenting it in a manner for the reader to become familiar with our group. I was not initially seeking to understand shared patterns of behaviors (Creswell, 2013; Creswell and Creswell, 2017). As a result, ethnography did not fit. This misfit is also one reason that I reluctantly use *autoethnography* and often prefer leaning onto the phrasing of *first-person* perspective, such as in chapter five. Though, I arrived at *autoethnography* using *narrative inquiry* (Kim, 2015), *action inquiry* (Torbert, 2006), and *first-person action research* (Marshall, 2016). This path from *first-person action research* or from *narrative inquiry* is not inconsistent as written in Marshall (2016) and in Holman Jones *et al.*, (2016). Some authors even point out that it does not matter whether the researcher is approaching autoethnography from their ethnography roots, narrative inquiry roots, or self-study roots. All these approaches encapsulate how the researchers understand themselves in relation to a larger overall social structure and community. As a result, the term in this thesis aligns with the author's acknowledgment that *autoethnography* is often used in hybrid qualitative methodologies and is favored when describing such forms as critical reflexive narrative inquiry or critical reflexive action research (Holman Jones *et al.*, 2016).

Although the thesis journeyed to a place where phenomenology could have been a valid and an appropriate fitting approach, I argue that it did not start there. Phenomenological study aims to describe the common meaning for individuals' lived

experiences (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). As the thesis transformed, there were critical times that common meaning emerged, such as in the themes in chapter four. However, I did not begin with the goal of a common meaning. I began to examine how volunteers could manage the non-profit through the lens of singular and individual experiences, such as is the focus with *narrative inquiry* (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). I was actually surprised to discover that so much in common existed between the volunteers, including myself. As a result, it took the culmination of the individuals' stories and my own *first-person* reflections to arrive at what I never thought a phenomenological approach could have achieved. Much of this likely had to do with my own biases and limitations. For example, I initially approached the thesis seeking management methods and assumed individuals' stories could reveal such practices. And as discussed elsewhere, though I approached the project from an insider in name, 'in the name of rigor,' I was framing the initial design as if I was an outsider. I believe the data supports that I needed to begin *thinking narratively* before some of those biases were understood and, possibly, softened.

#### **3.4.6.b Beginning to Think Narratively**

Within this section, I will explore what it means to think narratively (Connelly and Clandinin, 2006) and how thinking narratively applied to my project. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) highlight four points:

- (1) Imagining a life-space
- (2) Living and telling as starting points for collecting field texts
- (3) Defining and balancing the commonplaces
- (4) Investment of the self in the inquiry

Connelly and Clandinin first argue that to think narratively requires the researcher to imagine the place where the research will occur, imagine where the participants will live, and imagine the participants' lived experiences. The authors argue that the researcher should essentially plan and strive to be self-conscious of everything ongoing within the space (Connelly and Clandinin, 2006, p. 481; Kim, 2015, p. 90). Much like Marshall's (2016) recommendation to ask *how is this moment inquiry* or Heron and Reason's argument to *research with people rather than on people* (Heron and Reason,

2006), Connelly and Clandinin (2006)'s recommendation to imagine the topics, participants, and space shaped the interviews. *Who are the key volunteers that I need to speak to about my research? What are the volunteers' relationships to the problem, to one another, and even to me? What is the space in which this study will occur? What does that space look like?*

As shown, it shaped the volunteers that I heard from, where the interviews were held, the cadence of the conversation, and the questions that followed. When one volunteer appeared uncomfortable entering an interview about leadership change after we just left speaking with a newly hired paid leader, I began our interview by asking the volunteer to tell me stories about some of his or her most joyful moments volunteering. After I concluded the first set of interviews, I recounted those stories and imagined what those experiences may have been like. In turn, it directly shaped the following interviews. And while I was imagining, I imagined myself in those spaces. This process directly shaped my own story later discussed in chapter five.

Connelly and Clandinin next argue that for the researcher to think narratively, then he or she must imagine life as in the past and in the present, i.e., as the study is currently unfolding. Narrative inquiry will require *living, telling, retelling, and reliving*. While *telling* occurs as the lived experiences in the past, such as through interviews, artifacts, and conversations, *living* will occur in the present. *Living* is likely to occur through observation and unfold throughout the research project (Connelly and Clandinin, 2006, p. 481-482; Kim, 2015, p. 90). The initial goal was to tend toward the *telling*. This is likely because it was an approach that I could make sense of. However, as the stories emerged from the volunteers, the focus became more than about *telling*. *Living* became more prominent. The focus began to balance the four requirements of narrative inquiry. Chapters 4 through 6 aim to not only show a balance between *living* and *telling* but also to show the integration of all four requirements.

Thirdly, as we think about and imagine the life space, Connelly and Clandinin (2006) suggest defining and balancing the commonplaces. The commonplaces are separated into three categories: (1) temporally (2) sociality (3) place. In the *temporally*, events or participants are always in a transition. As a result, an event or the participant is not necessarily directly described but rather it is described through each tense of time,

i.e., viewed in relation to the past, in relation to the present, and, if possible, in relation to the future. The authors argue that the *temporality commonplace* cannot be overemphasized. Rather than stating that a volunteer is this way or that way, I aim to see volunteers as having a particular history that correlates to a certain present behavior that may project itself in certain manners in the future. In the *sociality* commonplace, the interest includes both the personal (such as feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions) and the social (such as existential conditions, environment, forces, and other people) conditions. This interest can also be towards the participant and or, the inquirer. Because of the dual interest, narrative inquiry should balance focusing on one's thoughts and feelings with one's conditions. As a result, narrative inquiry is neither overly personalized nor overly generalized (Connelly and Clandinin, 2006, p. 479-482; Kim, 2015, p. 90). Several helpful questions to consider for the *sociality* commonplace include: *How will I negotiate my relationship with other volunteers? How can I sustain those relationships with other volunteers and executives? How much collaborative exploration will occur with other volunteers and executives?* The last commonplace, *place*, means the physical place. The key importance to *place* is to understand that *some place* influences all the events and stories. To ignore this, I can fall into the trap of generalizations (Connelly and Clandinin, 2006, p. 480-481). I believe that I have avoided this trap by bounding this research to the place of the thesis and have written when the place changed.

The last point that Connelly and Clandinin suggest is, as the inquirer, to invest oneself into the inquiry so living data is collected. The inquirer will become intertwined with the participants' lives. This will impact data collecting, participant relationships, and the research itself (Connelly and Clandinin, 2006, p. 482; Kim, 2015, p. 90). The authors argue that narrative inquiry does not require an autobiographic study but requires the self-consciousness of their personal connection with the living (Connelly and Clandinin, 2006, p. 482). While a complete autobiographical study was not performed in this project, I did rely heavily on *first-person inquiry* and *autoethnography* to leverage how the data was impacting my practice. See chapter five.

### 3.4.7 Ethical Considerations

In management research, Easterby-Smith *et al.* write how ethics can be a

problematic area as many scenarios arise that make creating rigid principles difficult (2012). However, according to Richardson, ethics is an area of moral responsibility (1990). As a result, one principle that will be the foundational principle that will guide my research is to ensure no harm to participants occurs (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2012). To begin this practice, I spoke with individual volunteers to explain the goal of the thesis, the criteria that I used to select potential participants, answer any initial questions that participants had, and then provide participants with two documents: (1) participant information sheet (PIS) and (2) informed consent form. See Appendix 1 and Appendix 2, respectively. These conversations occurred during an informal time and setting so potential participants did not feel rushed nor pressured. Potential participants were informed that they did not need to answer during that conversation but could just let me know if they were interested after they had time to review the provided documents. In order for them to feel less pressured, I also told them that I would not follow up, but for them to know that they had the freedom to participate until I concluded the interviews. I believe that this approach minimized any potential harm to the volunteers and believe no harm was done.

The PIS provides a research overview including the research purpose, describes participants' involvement, and outlines how data collected will be used throughout the project. Participants who agreed to engage in the research process signed an informed consent form. Participants were made aware that they could discontinue their involvement at any time and revoke their consent; however, these documents are only the beginning.

Confidence and trust between the researcher and participants are essential characteristics (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2012). Awareness will be critical—first, my understanding of avoiding revealing questions. For example, questions that are improperly framed or asked in an unconscious manner could have accidentally exposed previous confidential interviews. Second, my awareness of avoiding deception is critical. As conversations between volunteers will occur continuously, I needed to ensure that participants know how I am using such discussions within the thesis. Not only will this awareness strengthen trust but also it can create an environment where quality data can be generated (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2012).

Even though trust is critical in most research projects, Clandinin and Connelly voice that the entire essence of narrative inquiry occurs in an ethical relationship between the participants and researcher (2000). Ethics, trust, and relationship are at the heart of the narrative inquiry. In narrative inquiry, the researcher is not just searching for facts, but he or she also is attempting to obtain the genuine, significant, and meaningful aspects of the participants' life (Josselson, 2007, p. 539). By being transparent and open about the research purposes, we not only do not harm but also create relationships that lead to quality data (Kim, 2015). And most importantly, we honor the sacredness of participants' stories and their humanity (Hendry, 2007; Kim, 2015). One tool that was used to *draw a line* was using voice recorders during these dialogs. As a result, participants were aware of when the conversation affected the research or if we were just *chatting*. On the rare exception that this pattern did not occur, an organizational executive and I were casually discussing the thesis' progress. Our conversation about the project's progression was unplanned and emergent. After reflecting on our conversation and the quality of the potential data, I later approached him and received formal permission before proceeding with incorporating the data in this project.

Additionally, as data collection commenced, protecting confidentiality through storage controls also became an essential factor. Interviews were recorded either through an audio or video format. After an interview took place, I moved the electronic data from the recording device onto a separate external hard drive when I returned home from the interview. That external drive was only connected to a tablet or computer when I transferred the data from the recorder or when transcribing the data. Otherwise, the data were stored in a locked cabinet. Keeping the data on a separate hard drive helped to prevent hacking or other kinds of theft. Keeping the hard drive in a physically locked cabinet also protected the data from physical theft. For backup purposes, I maintained a second external hard drive stored using the same physical controls, i.e., a locked cabinet. In case of device failure, a copy of all data was copied to this second hard drive when interviews were initially transferred.

Anonymity is also built into the data analysis processes, but interviews can appear to have a seeming fingerprint. The lived experiences of individuals can be challenging to hide, even behind a new name. As a result, incorporating data into the report in a manner that will protect participants as well as not misrepresent participants' intent will

be a critical objective to achieve (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2012; Josselson, 2007).

### **3.5 The Impact of the Research Design on Action Research and the Action Research Cycles**

#### *3.5.1 Overview*

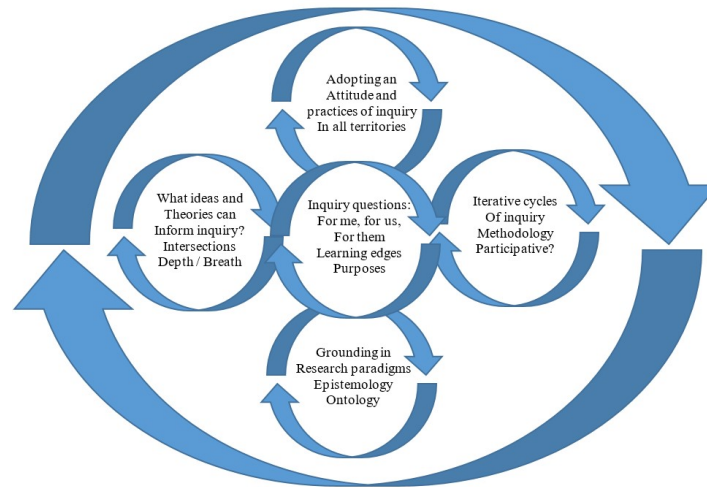
In this section, I will discuss the impact that the research design had on action research and an overview of how the action research cycles were executed. Easterby-Smith *et al.* (2012) outline that action research designs have two fundamental beliefs that are they built upon:

1. The action researcher's primary objective should be to learn about the organization through attempting to change it, as learning is maximized through this process.
2. To the extent possible, individuals who are most affected by such changes should be involved in the research process.

Heron and Reason argue for this second point from the perspective of *researching with people rather than on people* (2006). Rather than a methodology, action research can be viewed as an orientation of inquiry (Reason and McArdle, 2004), and so this position will be the lens that I have viewed action research. This position also supports excluding planned change in pursuit of emergent change. Selecting an action modality could have taken various paths, with each way having many branching paths. Action learning, action science, action inquiry, cooperative inquiry, and appreciative inquiry are some of the available action modalities (Coghlan, 2010). However, selecting the appropriate action modality ought to be chosen based on what is required by any given situation (Coghlan, 2010). Additionally, following Creswell *et al.*'s (2007) advice, integrating different theories and approaches helps the researcher create their own living theory. In this thesis, the research question led me to incorporate a narrative inquiry approach (Kim, 2015). Even though I originally planned to use a different modality, as I listened to volunteers' stories, action inquiry emerged as a complementary action modality to narrative inquiry (Coghlan, 2010; Kim, 2015). And with each story and each cycle of inquiry, I also continued to gravitate towards even a greater focus on *first-person action research* (Marshall, 2016).

As a result, for the overall action research cycle, I am adopting a dynamic model of action research. See Figure 1. This figure outlines the interplay between the primary dimensions when one is incorporating action research. As I stated before, a cornerstone to each dimension is repeatedly asking: “In what ways is this inquiry” (Marshall, 2016, p. 5). Marshall continues by saying that the model shows that an interactive process is critical. Changes may routinely occur as learning informs and influences the researcher and participants. In an emergent environment, inquiry reveals deeper meanings to issues and reshapes future inquiry. Fieldwork is not bound to a singular approach yet should occur in a learning cycle. Rather than a pre-determined plan for fieldwork, the learning cycle incorporates phases of reflection and review, which inform the following cycle. As a result, the researcher should feel that any feature can be radically changed (Marshall, 2016, p. 5). Marshall’s (2016) perspective echoes the journey within this project. The fieldwork was impacted by learning and reflection. New approaches did emerge.

**Figure 1 - Marshall's Dynamic Model of Action Research**



*Figure 1 - From 'First-Person Action Research: Living Life as Inquiry' (Marshall, 2016, p. 6)*

### 3.5.2 The Influence of Action Inquiry

#### 3.5.2.a Overview

When I first began studying action research, I neatly thought of action and inquiry



as separate events. Torbert and Taylor describe the typical action research cycle in which we first analyze and plan, then based on this analysis and planning, we take some sort of action. Afterward, we reflect and analyze the action that will inform the cycle, beginning again with additional cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (2008, p. 241). But action inquiry does not take this linear approach; instead, action and inquiry are interwoven (Torbert, 2006). As Torbert (2006) describes, the action is, in fact, inquiry. And as we inquire, we are also taking action. Torbert's (2006) position is how I would describe my experience of this project. I would inquire with others or reflect by myself, followed by action, such as diving deep into the literature of re-development (Kramer and Danielson, 2016) after an interview with a volunteer. I would seek action, such as changing my practice or attempting to sell action to management, and inquiry followed (see chapter six). Thus, action and inquiry were interwoven. Figure 6 in Appendix 4 illustrates this point and shows how such interweaving looked in this thesis.

Additionally, Marshall (2016) writes that action inquiry can be considered highly aspirational though. It is considered "consciousness in the midst of action" (Torbert, 1991, p. 221). The discipline and rigor that is expected are intimidating and challenging (Torbert, 1976). Such required discipline demands the researcher to experience an unimaginable degree of self-development before he or she has the capacity for relational, valid, and quality action (Torbert, 1976, p. 167). Yet, and somewhat paradoxical, Marshall says that action inquiry also can be clearly described and formulaic at the beginning while later too robust, nuanced, and even demanding which is likely to lead the researcher to create their own distinct practice (2016, p. 32). Within the context of the research question, developing a distinct research practice was a purposeful goal. And in the end, I believe that I achieved this goal using action inquiry as one tool of many.

The aim in action inquiry is to develop one's capacity, as well as others' capacity, to cultivate and value "transformation, integrity, mutuality, justice, and sustainability" (Torbert and Taylor, 2008, p. 240) for the person, the group, and the system. The research design attempts to stimulate inquiry at each of the three levels of inquiry (*First-person*, *Second-person*, and *Third-person*) while aiming for interdependency (Reason and McArdle, 2004). Through action inquiry, the complexities of the world can be

embraced by using multiple levels of inquiry (Torbert and Taylor, 2008).

Briefly summarizing each level of inquiry, first-person action research focuses on the researcher to cultivate inquiry into all that he or she thinks, feels, and does (Marshall and Reason, 2007). Marshall (2016) highlights that people are sometimes ashamed of their individual inquiry process. As a result, rather than incorporating first-person inquiry, individuals will pretend to be more objective or rational than actually occurred during the research process. I find Marshall's (2016) comment reassuring because I also found myself attempting to "appear more objective." Through the writing process, I attempted to remain open about my first-person inquiry process to maintain the ongoing complexities and develop richness (Marshall, 2016). The writing process led to deeper reflection and, ultimately, planted the seeds for the learning that was derived in chapter five, a chapter that has influences of autoethnography. Marshall described autoethnography as a potential cousin to first-person action research, although she would not go as far as to call the terms interchangeable (2016, p. 8). As such, I borrowed from autoethnography as such a cousin. I will not attempt to differentiate between where first-person action research ends and where autoethnography began. See my previous discussion for a greater explanation. Rather, I will attempt to focus on framing such experiences as *first-person inquiry*.

Second-person action research focuses on people inquiring collectively about specific concerns and mutual problems (Marshall, 2016). The importance of second-person research is the belief that a form of knowing exists and that existence is derived from people in relationships with each other (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014). Much of the research that occurred with executives and volunteering managers occurred at the *second-person* level. As I showed in the following chapters, I presented the themes in a participatory style by *testing the plausibility* and *selling* the actionable themes (Ramsey, 2014).

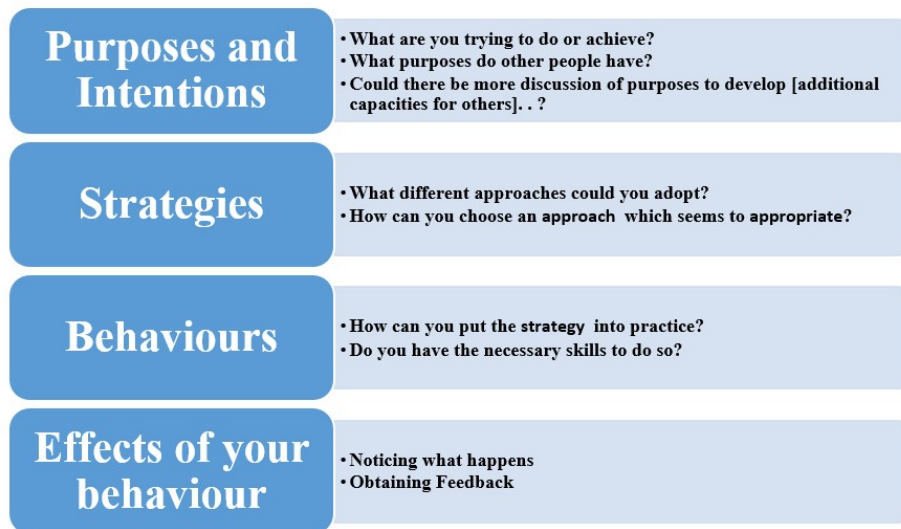
Third-person action research focuses on promoting and supporting inquiry over time within the organization (Marshall, 2016). Third-person approaches aim to mobilize a more comprehensive community (Raelin et. al, 1999). Within this project, the second-person inquiry and first-person inquiry will support the third-person inquiry. However, the long-term influence of third-person action research is beyond the scope

of this project. The success depended upon (1) how *testing the plausibility* of these research themes and (2) *selling* the actionable themes to executives and other volunteers are finally received. As a result, and as will be shown, this project will largely be bound to *first-person* and *second-person* research as each played a major role to inform the research and to support testing ultimate actions.

### 3.5.2.b Discussing First-Person Action Inquiry

One tool that First-Person Action Inquiry adopts is incorporating and practicing the four territories of experience (Fisher *et al.*, 2003; Marshall, 2016; Torbert and Taylor, 2008). Marshall (2016) outlines the four territories as the following:

**Figure 2 - Four Territories of Experience**



*Figure 2 - Quoted from 'First-Person Action Research: Living Life as Inquiry' (Marshall, 2016, p. 32)*

Even though I will primarily use Marshall's (2016) titles for conciseness, Torbert (2006) uses different titles for the four territories of experience. I find the differences subtle, but, at times, Torbert's (2006) titles may better convey what I am attempting to say. As a result, respectively to Figure 2, Torbert (2006) uses: (1) vision / intention / dynamics of attention (2) realm of thought / our own thoughts and feelings (3) our own sensations as we are experiencing them within (4) the outside world (Torbert and Taylor, 2008, p. 242; Torbert, 2013, p. 288). At times, I will reference both names when

exploring the subtle differences that are important to me and when they helped me frame ideas, problems, and conversations differently.

As Reason outlines, the purpose is more than setting objectives. It is more than the immediate. Purpose, like each of the other three territories of experience, is simultaneously influenced by strategies, thoughts, and behaviors. There can even be several purposes nested within one another. Purpose can be emergent and changing. It may be narrow or broad. One aim of incorporating action inquiry is for the purpose of becoming more conscious. Disciplines can play an important role in cultivating awareness and consciousness (1994a, p. 50-51). Though, Marshall finds purpose both intriguing and elusive when attempting to apply it to one's practice. Yes, there is typically a surface-level purpose, but it is usually followed by other disjointed and, or conflicting purposes (2016, p. 33). The questions in figure 2 will be practiced in this project to seek intention and presence.

Strategies are the mental and emotional territory of theories, dreams, and passion. The aim is to develop and integrate each part of one's oneness, such as soul, focus, character (Torbert, 2006, p. 4). Strategies can be developed through our conceptual knowing and feeling that builds a framework to inform one's action. Strategies can be emergent as feedback informs which approach is appropriate for the given moment (Reason, 1994a, p 52). However, as Reason (1994a) shows, strategies can include many theoretical perspectives and tools that a person has built up over their practice. One such tool is Torbert's model of action inquiry (Reason, 1994a; Torbert, 2013) that I will be relying upon. I will also incorporate two other approaches: narrative interviewing (Kim, 2015) and writing as inquiry (Marshall, 2016). Though there is much overlap between these three tools, each will help me focus my attention on particular intentions. Ultimately, the aim of any kind of strategy or approach is (1) to help develop a sense of purpose or (2) to help guide behavior (Reason, 1994a, p 53).

Behavior is the sensual and expressed territory of the practical, the aesthetic, and the performance (Torbert, 2006, p. 4). Developing this territory requires the attention of movements, tones, words, and silence (citing Torbert in Reason, 1981, 1994a). The behavior of developing participative relationships is even paradoxical. It can be both authoritative and democratic as well as both centered and expanding. Behavior

questions what skills are needed as well as whether one possesses those skills. It is also a territory where deep, personal, psychological work can support the development and extend one's repertoire of tools (Reason, 1994a, p. 53).

Effects of your behavior, or the outside world, are focused attention (Marshall, 2016; Torbert and Taylor, 2008). It is the territory where “performance, its effects, and all other things are observed, measured, and evaluated” (Torbert, 2006, p. 4). Our knowledge of the outside world is often derived from our senses and our ability to notice, but such knowledge is also filtered through our internal processes. One method to enhance our attention is to incorporate systematic data gathering approaches and tools, such as audio or video recorders (Reason, 1994a). Though, pushing for feedback is often an essential and effective practice. However, it is important to remember and to question that each person's frame will shape their feedback and what they offer (Marshall, 2016). *What is someone hiding from me because of the lack of interpersonal relationships? Can we build such relationships so what was once hidden is now revealed? How are others cognitively and emotionally experiencing me?* Other volunteers must be willing to share their experiences with me for in-depth feedback to occur. (Reason, 1994a, p. 53-54). Broadly speaking, Torbert recommends seeking *seeking-friends* (Torbert, 2006). Fortunately, within this project, I had two *seeking-friends* who also participated in the *testing the plausibility* phase. One of the participants was able to provide additional feedback even during the project. As shown in later chapters, using their feedback directly boosted my learning from *first-person action research*.

I appreciate Marshall's reflection on the cost of questioning purpose. At times, opening up the discussion to reframing is critical. However, at other times, and especially if routinely repeated, reframing and exploring can be a negative when people *just want to move on*. They or you may not have the capacity, energy, or time. Blindly intervening can exhaust people and may limit future openness and dialogue. As a result, one key to reframing was to reflect on whether the current behaviors and strategies are effective, overused, or underused (2016).

As Torbert and Taylor state, these territories of experience are more than analytical categories. They are of the territories of experience that are accessible within all

phenomena and can also occur simultaneously and continuously (2008, p. 241). The authors continue by highlighting that we typically take actions and make observations of the outside world by applying judgments that are built upon categories of thought and attention that we take for granted. But as we utilize action inquiry, we start to challenge those areas that we take for granted. Several vital questions to challenge oneself include: (1) *Am I aware of which territory that I am listening with at the moment?* (2) *Am I aware of the intentions that I am currently acting with?* (3) *How are my language, tone, and rhythm influencing our shared intentions and alignment* (Torbert and Taylor, 2008, p. 241-242)? Though, Torbert argues that we rarely exercise our attention. thus, our *territories of experience* rarely expand (2004, p. 22). As a result, I acknowledge that these questions are to develop and support inquiry rather than conclude with resolved solutions (Marshall, 2016).

An illustration of development in this thesis is how I revalued the influence of the research site, i.e., a faith-based, local church. Without dialectic friction with others, such as the examiners, and *scanning the territories of experience* (Marshall, 2016), I doubt that this revaluation would have occurred. The following re-discusses the *territories of experience* considering the faith-based element.

As stated above, visioning is the attentional inquiring toward the purpose or origins (Torbert, 2006, p. 254). In the initial research question, the purpose focused on management. However, through inquiry, I show in chapter six how the purpose shifted to the volunteers, who could have been influenced by their faith. And maybe more importantly, I show in chapter five my *first-person inquiry* which was influenced, shaped, and re-shaped by my biases and faith. As the purpose shifted, I realized the importance of the research setting, i.e., a faith-based organization, and this realization became more and more prominent during each cycle of inquiry outlined in later chapters. I ultimately conclude the thesis arguing the importance of *rebirth*. Though I frame it differently, *rebirth* is a critical component of my faith.

*Scanning* (Marshall, 2016) also helped to develop each of the other four *territories of experience*. Such as, when re-examining strategizing, the mental and emotional territories (Torbert, 2006, p. 254) continued to include an expanding reflection on whether other individuals and I were motivated to volunteer as a means to work out our

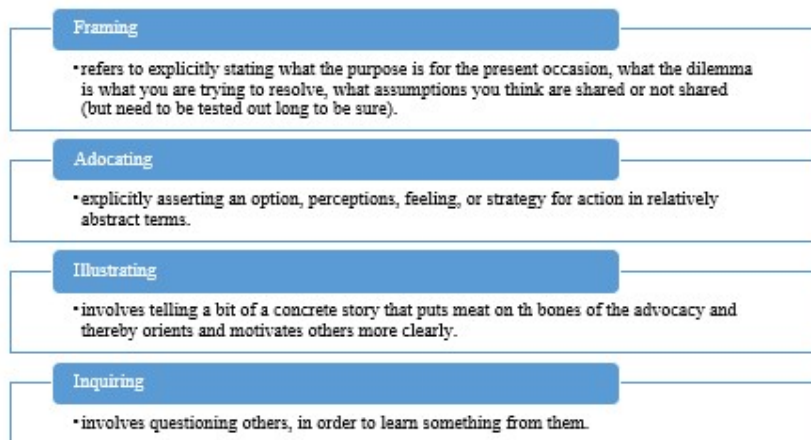
faith, or were we motivated by something other than our faith (Denning, 2021). This fact seemed most prominent when I needed to reflect on why Matthew separated volunteer management from our faith. See chapter six.

From a performing / behavior point of view (Torbert, 2006, p. 254), I initially viewed my faith and the volunteers' faith as critical to the individuals but not necessarily important to how we practiced the "skill" of volunteering. Torbert (2004) highlights that we often overlook a great deal of what occurs. It was not until I assessed the influence of the outside world (Torbert, 2006, p. 254) that I ultimately understood the importance of the research site. And as the focus began to shift to the people, I realized that the faith-based construct could not be ignored and was a critical component to my practice as well as to the thesis.

### 3.5.2.c *Discussing Second-Person Action Inquiry*

While First-Person action inquiry practices territories of experience, Second-Person action inquiry practices another complementary framework, the four *parts of speech*. The combinations of these tools allow one to purposefully focus and cultivate one's attention. Even though the four *parts of speech* may first appear linear, the invitation for speakers is to notice and experiment, which often leads to an interwoven experience (Fisher *et al.*, 2003; p. 23-25; Marshall, 2016, p. 34). The four *parts of speech* are:

**Figure 3 - Four Parts of Speech**



*Figure 3 – Quoted from ‘Action Inquiry: Interweaving Multiple Qualities of Attention for Timely Action’ (Torbert and Taylor, 2008, p. 244)*

As Torbert (2006) highlights, the four parts of speech express action even within their names. Torbert (2006) continues by arguing that, in practice, speakers often advocate and illustrate. He clarifies that these imbalances are more an exploitative mode of speaking and believes that they often lead to unclear dialogs (Fisher *et al.*, 2003; Marshall, 2016; Torbert, 2006). By moving toward balancing all parts of speech, speakers move away from this exploitative mode of speaking and towards a transformative mode of speaking. People are then invited to collaboration and openness, more assumptions may be explored, and conversations are more likely to become less habitual and repetitive (Marshall, 2016; Torbert, 2006).

The *four parts of speech* can also help guide one's writing (Marshall, 2016). However, Marshall suggests adding a fifth strand when writing what she labels themes and issues. She continues by highlighting that writing can be weighed down by details emphasizing advocating (Marshall 2016, p. 35). Frankly, before I began this project, I believe that I held the bias that advocating was the primary purpose of this thesis. In the depths of my mind, my goal was to answer my research question by illustrating with the data that I gathered and then advocate, or defend, why I thought I was right. My initial position used framing and inquiring more in words than in action. My goal is for the following chapters to reflect that I balanced the four parts of speech. Marshall suggests naming and playing with the analysis to better explore and synthesize the data to obtain critical analysis. Through this play, the themes will be incorporated to interact with the relevant academic literature (Marshall, 2016, p. 35).

Essentially, as Torbert outlines, *framing* is when the speaker explicitly puts their perspective and position out for others to examine. As stated previously, this is also the element of speaking that is missing most often in a dialog. This lack of framing, or reframing, leads to people being forced to guess and speculate at the frame. Speakers usually assume that others have guessed correctly and that each is sharing the same overall purpose. However, this is usually not the case. Rather, people can feel manipulated or hold negative emotions because the lack of framing, or reframing, leads to misunderstanding the overall purpose and intent (2004, p. 28). Balancing framing and reframing were critical in the narrative interviews. If I did not frame well enough, the stories may not have led to data that will help answer my research question. If I interrupted or reframed too often, I could miss critical turn points in other volunteers'



stories. I framed at the beginning of the narrative interviews and only after significant turn points in other volunteers' stories. Even though this approach did generate moments where the data seemed irrelevant, I found myself surprised on several occasions at how often some of the initial 'irrelevant' stories from the volunteers ultimately generated unexpected richness.

Torbert argues that *advocating* can often be overused. However, when we are usually advocating, it is skewed toward what we want and rarely touches how we feel. Advocating our feelings can be difficult because: (1) we may operate mostly unconscious and lack the awareness of our feelings, and (2) we do not want to be vulnerable. Social norms and, or a lack of skill set can lead to 'undiscussable' topics. Feelings do remain, though, and might only appear when they become overwhelming and burst out. An eruption of emotional advocating may put others on the defensive and not allow them to engage fully. If a speaker can begin vulnerably, the speaker can potentially invite others to a shared experience where trust and honesty become the conversation's foundation (2004, p. 28-29). Advocating played a brief but significant role within this research. One strength of using narrative inquiry is moving away from advocating toward inquiring and framing. I relied on advocating for specific changes that were synthesized from the data that was collected. This focus was at the organizational level, and I relied on *first-person inquiry* to better understand how this will affect my practice as a volunteer.

*Illustrating* was vital because it could provide more clarity to what the speaker is advocating. People are more likely to infer differently than the intended purpose, mission, and strategy if the speaker relies on advocating without providing any additional illustrations. Because there is rarely a single interpretation of what people hear, illustrating gives *more meat to the bone* (Torbert 2004, p. 29). When I was unsure of how to interrupt the volunteers' stories, one of the most beneficial tools was to ask, "how did that look?" Also, when I struggled to connect with Matthew at the *testing the plausibility* stage, illustration again played a pivotal role.

Torbert writes that *inquiring* is the critical component of data generation for this research. Inquiring is much more difficult in practice than in theory because we often do not approach inquiring with a curious mind. Rather than seeking to learn something

more from other people, we often inquire using leading questions. Rather than seek confrontation and honesty, we often inquire for confirmation that creates barriers. One method to help the speaker inquire more honestly is for him or her to move away from their own position and begin inquiring about how other people's position (which is comprised of their own frames, advocates, and illustrations) shape the dialogue. Additionally, inquiring may be ineffective if it lacks the other three parts of speech. Torbert calls this naked inquiry, which usually leads to defensiveness (2004, p. 29-30). As I have already described, many of the other facets of the research design promoted me to move toward inquiring.

### *3.5.3 Integrating of Writing as Inquiry and the Influence of Autoethnography*

One approach that was taken during the action cycles is writing (Zuber-Skerritt and Perry, 2002). Writing, or the researcher's writing style, can be seen as a political statement and an epistemological issue (Marshall, 2016; Richardson, 2003). Marshall says that writing as discovery is not about the product but rather about the process (2016, p. 97). Suppose we incorporate writing as a method of inquiry. In that case, it not only becomes a method of discovery and analysis but also becomes a path to learn about new aspects of our research topic and our relationships to that research topic (Richardson, 2000, p. 924). As a result, writing was not treated as some late-stage event in which the researcher compiles what is now known (Marshall, 2016). It became part of an integrated segment of the research process where a line between fieldwork and writing no longer existed (Clough, 1992; Marshall, 2016). For example, after each group of interviews, I would transcribe and code those interviews. During that time, I would also write about what I was learning. I would not recognize my collection method as using a research journal, though I would not argue if others would consider it so. Rather, I was preparing for the next interviews but also exploring my experiences. I was analyzing but also emoting. I was appreciating the volunteers' stories but also beginning to pay attention to my story. I was writing chapter drafts but also reflecting. As the following chapters will show, the data were evoking.

Additionally, Marshall outlines numerous ways that writing as inquiry can be incorporated in an action research practice. For me, the following are the ways that I incorporated Marshall's suggestion in this thesis:

- Blending a reflective stream of how living life as inquiry looks within this project
- Exploring different issues, narratives, and events through writing
- Incorporating through the reflection phases of the action research cycle
- Including to expand upon fieldwork and outline evidence
- Helping to discover an emergent form to present specific parts of the project (2016, p. 99)

Overall, the process of *writing as inquiry* promoted an autoethnographic experience. This makes sense to me as Marshall writes that autoethnography is “a related discipline for first-person inquiry” (2016, p. 196-197). Creswell “defines autoethnography as the idea of multiple layers of consciousness, the vulnerable self, the coherent self, critiquing the self in social contexts, the subversion of dominant discourses, and the evocative potential” (2013, p. 73). Autoethnography holds the writer’s personal story while also holding the larger cultural meaning for such a story (Creswell, 2016, p. 73). As such, I borrowed from this genre in seeking those multiple layers of consciousness.

Haynano (1979) would argue that this approach lends itself well for post-graduate management research. Though I would not strongly argue otherwise, I would prefer to argue that borrowing from this genre lends itself well to support action research through the modality of action inquiry. And, autoethnography is further leveraged in this by using narrative inquiry to support the second-person inquiry because, as Haynano (1979) points out, I am completely part of the group being studied. So, when I hear the stories of the volunteers, they promote inquiry into my history and into my story - Moments such as, “I recall when that happened” or “I didn’t realize she felt that alone. Why did I not know” - This experience was further supported when I attempted to practice *writing as inquiry*. I was writing about their story as well as my story.

However, when you read later Chapters, I believe it is important to highlight that I only intended to borrow from the autoethnography genre rather than for this to be an autoethnography practice. The conceptualizing of autoethnography, such as by Holman Jones *et al.* (2016), is beyond the scope of the work within this project, and I want to treat such a genre with respect. I agree with Holman Jones *et al.* (2016) that not all

personal writing can be called autoethnography. However, below are some of the areas (Holman Jones *et al.*, 2016, p. 22-25) that I leaned into:

(1) **Comment on/Critique Culture and Cultural Practice** - Since I am part of the story, I wrote about my relationship to the stories, culture, and volunteering practice.

(2) **Make Contributions to Existing Research** - Even though I do not intend to make contributions to the existing research, I did intend to contribute to the existing narrative research in this project and believe that my contribution deepened my understanding of the research themes.

(3) **Embrace Vulnerability with Purpose** - *Writing as Inquiry* promotes vulnerability with a purpose. I embraced and continued such inquiry throughout the project.

(4) **Create Reciprocity in order to Compel a Response** - Holman Jones *et al.* write that cultivating a reciprocity and then expecting a response is the process in which the autoethnographer” achieves the other three characteristics of autoethnography (2016, p. 25). I argue that I achieved this goal to compel a response to the audience. However, since this is an emergent inquiry, the particular audience is my fellow organizational members.

### **3.6 Discussing the Research Participants and the Data**

#### *3.6.1 Research Participants*

Looking back at the research question and sub-questions, I considered what type of organizational participants would generate sufficient data for these questions. Even though it is not a prerequisite, long-term, active volunteers who have experienced several leadership changes provided much of the data in this project. Many volunteers have helped with short-term events but are mostly inactive. When leadership changes occur, these volunteers' roles are not usually impacted and do not experience changes in their position. So, focusing on active volunteers, I interviewed those who volunteer approximately forty hours a month.

Since I used a narrative approach, participants needed to be involved in narrative thinking. Narrative thinking is seen as a method of creating a story from one's experiences (Kim, 2015). Robinson and Hawpe (cited in Kim, 1986, 2015, p. 156)

outline three components of narrative thinking: (1) the narrative schema, (2) the storyteller's prior knowledge and experience, (3) a diversity of cognitive strategies.

Participants' diversity of cognitive strategies may vary. However, as the researcher, I attempted to guide participants using narrative schemes to be open about selecting, comparing, inferring, arranging, and revisiting their experiences (Kim, 2015, p. 157). Limiting participants to active volunteers helped focus on collecting data from those who have the available time and focus on committing to wrestling with these schemes as well as with re-living and excavating their stories.

The interviews' sample size is often a core concern about whether sufficient data can be obtained (Kim, 2015). Some argue that fifteen interviews, plus or minus ten interviews, is sufficient (Kvale, 1996). Some others say that the appropriate sample size can range from anywhere between six participants and twelve participants. Even though qualitative theorists disagree on the optimal sample size, reaching thematic redundancy is critical (Beitin, 2012). As a result, I focused on three points to achieve an appropriate sample size: (1) interview to obtain thematic redundancy, (2) meet the six-participant threshold, (3) obtain a minimum of fifteen interviews. Each of these was achieved.

### *3.6.2 Data Collection Methods*

As stated above, the main research question, sub-questions, and research objectives will inform the research design, methodology, and approaches. The design, methodology, and approaches will inform the data collection process. Using a narrative approach, data is usually collected using interviews, artifacts, personal journals, and social conversations (Creswell, 2013). Narratives are (1) the primary way that people make sense of their experiences and (2) social as even individual narratives have different commonplaces (Chase, 2003). As a result, in-depth interviews were the primary data collection method.

Through interviews, I attempted to explore the experiences, motives, and opinions of the participants and hope to learn to see the world through their perspective (Rubin and Rubin, 2011, p. 3). Stories of the same events may be very different from one another as participants attempt to arrange their lives through a meaningful context (Josselson and Lieblich, 1995, p. 154). Josselson and Lieblich (1995) refer to the subjective truth. As each participant retells their story, organizes their experiences,

interprets prior events, and creates meaning, his or her truth can potentially be investigated. Larsson and Sjoblom highlight that stories convey dual meanings. The first meaning is about the identity of the teller. The second meaning is another about the social context (cited Crossley, 2010, 2000). As I expand upon in the generating and capturing data section and the analyzing and interpreting data section below, the process of digitally recording the audio of the interviews was extremely beneficial. It allowed me the freedom to repeatedly listen to the dialogs. I was able to search for truths and dual meanings. I was able to *play* with the data.

The concept of *play* appeared several times in the literature (Dewey cited in Latta, 1934, 2013; Kim, 2015; Marshall, 2016, p. 35). Dewey argued that playfulness and seriousness were ideal mental conditions. Essentially, we are to move forward, attempting to be free of dogmatism and prejudice and rather have mindfulness of intellectual curiosity and flexibility that is focused on the topic. Mental play is about open-mindedness. No, playfulness is not toying with a subject, instead it shows such interest in the matter to allow it to unfold. Playfulness and Seriousness are preserving integrity while also being free of arbitrary restrictions (Dewey cited in Latta, 1934, 2013; Kim, 2015).

### 3.6.3 *Generating and Capturing Data*

Data will be generated by a narrative approach using open-ended interview questions. The goal is not to obtain an overwhelming quantity of data but rather to focus on excavating meaningful data (Kim, 2015). One of the reflective questions that I considered after each interview is: *do I consider this a meaningful shared experience?* With consent, I captured all data using, primarily, an audio recorder. If any participant was uncomfortable with audio recording, based on their comfort level, I would have taken notes in place of audio recording. As Rubin and Rubin (2011) point out, some interviewees are shy of being recorded. However, once the conversation begins, they write that interviewees typically forget about being recorded. In this case, I found Rubin and Rubin's position true. Volunteers seemed a little nervous at the beginning of the first interview. However, as they began telling stories, they seemed to quickly forget about being recorded.

According to Rubin and Rubin, one advantage of recording over notetaking is that

I can better stay in the conversation and not worry about missing a detail. However, a disadvantage of relying on recording devices is that the researcher may struggle with recalling conversations from memory (2011). Since I am attempting to capture participants' lived experiences, I will structure the interviews openly with an emphasis on *'can you describe'* and *'can you tell me about'* questions and will rely on probing questions to excavate richer experiences. On the rare occasion, I also incorporate notetaking, not primarily as a recording instrument, but as a tool to help me structure appropriate follow-up questions without interrupting the speakers' story (Rubin and Rubin, 2011). However, normally, I relied on a broad set of questions (created from previous interviews) to guide stories in case volunteers attempted to rush their stories. With some volunteers, I found that they described their experiences in great detail, while other volunteers seemed to want to rush to the conclusion. By having broad questions, I could better follow up with *'can you tell me more about'* this or that which I believed led to richer data.

#### *3.6.4 Analyzing and Interpreting Data*

Riessman (2008) argues that narrative analysis and transcription are difficult to distinguish. Arranging and rearranging narrative data is a process that occurs through the lens of what we discover. Each cycle of testing, clarifying, and discovering is filtered through the past experience and influences the next cycle (citing Mishler in Riessman, 1991, 2008; Riessman, 2008). Ultimately, these analyses and interpretations influence how we shape the narratives and our findings (Riessman, 2008).

Even though analyzing and interpreting data is not likely to be this neat and possess emergent characteristics (Riessman, 2008), I will generally follow these steps (Rubin and Rubin, 2011, p. 190):

- Transcribe and summarize narrative interviews
- Code data (meaning define, find, and mark) pertinent concepts, themes, and other varies important points
- Collect, group, and summarize similar themes
- Sort and resort each group while searching for any sub-groups and parallels among other sub-group

- Create an integrated image of the various descriptions
- Combine the themes and concepts to explain and test the researcher's ideas against the interviews

See Section 4.4 in chapter four for the discussion of how the themes emerged and Appendix 3 for an example. Within these previous steps, I relied on Labov's Model as an initial resource for narrative analysis. See Figure 4 for the six modified components of Labov's model (Riessman, 2008). The model's focus is to help reveal what the told story is ultimately about by emphasizing the recapture of action and meaning of the narrator's personal experience (Kim, 2015, p 201). There are several benefits of using the Labov model, such as (1) it can help identify important narratives within transcripts, (2) allows comparisons between narratives because the model aims to uncover an underlying structure, (3) allows the analyst to evaluate the speaker's perspective of events (Patterson, 2013, p. 33).

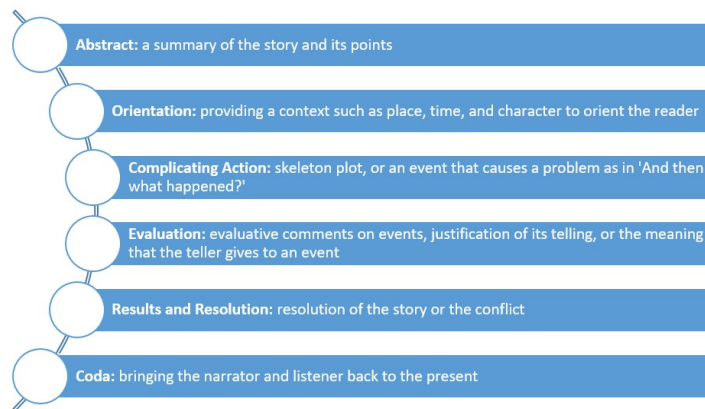
However, similar to Patterson (2013) and Riessman (2008), I also had problems with this model. Labov's definition of narratives requires a progression of clauses that are temporally ordered (citing Labov in Patterson, 1972, 2013). Though, my experience with the volunteers' stories seemed to echo Patterson's experience (2013). There was no doubt that the volunteers were telling me their personal lived experiences. However, they did not conform to the discrete events that are required for narratives by the Labovian approach.

Even though there are other models to analyze the data, I continued to use Labov's modified model as a foundation as it provided a useful starting point (Riessman, 2008). Though, as Patterson argues, I still found the fourth component, see *figure 4*, was one of the most important since those evaluation statements help interrupt what meaning the narrator gives to their experiences (2013). And to overcome some of the limitations that I experienced with Labov's model, I incorporated *flirting* with the data (Kim, 2015; Patterson, 2013). It seemed to echo Dewey's attitude of being *playful* but *serious* (Dewey cited in Latta, 1934, 2013; Kim, 2015). But rather than risk manipulating the data to *fit my narrative*, I relied on the listening and re-listening to interviews to promote *seriousness*. Many times, I paused and came back to re-listen to interviews weeks later in an attempt to gain a fresh perspective. In the next sections, I will expand the topic of



quality and rigor within this project.

**Figure 4 - Labov's Modified Model**



*Figure 4 – Quoted from 'Understanding Narrative Inquiry: The Crafting and Analysis of Stories as Research' (Kim, 2012, p. 201)*

### 3.7 Quality and Rigor

To some, *playing with research* may not sound rigorous nor high quality. Though as I stated above, *playfulness* must occur with *seriousness* (Dewey cited in Latta, 1934, 2013; Kim, 2015). To prevent manipulating narratives for my own means, I aimed to follow Gee (cited in Patterson, 1991, 2013, p. 40), who states that the existence of a narrative occurs once a sequential, thematic, and structural coherence materializes. As a result, it is the culmination that supports quality data and research. The following discusses quality and rigor in the context of *playfulness*, narratives, as well as the influence of action research in this project.

Action research strives to interweave together seemingly opposing positions, such as theory and practice or action and reflection (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014; Reason and Bradbury, 2006). As a researcher, I am to strive for rigor, but complexity arises because quality and rigor cannot trump the ability of people to work together. Because of this social phenomenon, multiple dimensions of quality exist to guide researchers. The primary concern of these dimensions is encouraging the good or well-being of the social system. However, this goodness is opaque and requires reflection on what is being learned and who is being served (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014, p.

666-667).

The following seven criteria were useful starting points that I used to guide quality (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014, p. 667):

- **Quality requires articulations of the objectives.** The project's aim is to examine *how do volunteer's manage a nonprofit through a leadership transition*. The extent to which the objective is accomplished will be a primary indicator of the quality of the research. *What themes materialized? How did executives and volunteers respond to these themes? What was the impact on my individual practice?*

- **Quality requires appropriate methods and processes.** As I outlined earlier in the chapter, the objective leads to appropriate methods and processes. However, quality is beyond a proper fit. It extends to showing the techniques within the research and ensuring that participants' voices are included (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014). By incorporating a narrative approach, participants' voices and processes will be apparent. By leaning on action inquiry as the action modality, the voices of executives and volunteering managers were reflected. And through the *first-person inquiry* and autoethnography approaches, my own voice was reflected in this project.

- **Quality requires partnership and participation.** A narrative approach that is being used is foundationally built on a relational partnership between the participants and researcher. Participants' values, concerns, and trust is a cornerstone of this approach (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Kim, 2015). I believe this partnership can be seen throughout the remaining part of this thesis, and that the quality of the data "was only achieved because of the partnership and participation of other volunteers, executives, and volunteering managers.

- **Quality requires contribution to action research theory-practice.** The report's outcomes chapter will outline how the action research impacts practice and/or theory (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014). See discussion below.

- **Quality requires actionability.** The extent to which generated knowledge guides action can reflect the quality of the research (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014). See discussion below.

- **Quality requires reflexivity.** As an insider, my ability to become a change agent

is enabled but also limited (Coghlan, 2019; Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014). Through reflection and self-locating, I needed to incorporate a personal, involved, and self-critical perspective. Incorporating *first-person inquiry* is the model that helped provide clarity about my role, clarity about research context, and clarity about how the research emerged (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014; Marshall, 2016). See the discussion below for more information as it also influenced my practice.

- **Quality requires significance.** The extent to which knowledge generated had meaning and relevance in supporting either, and individuals, communities, and the greater system (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014). See discussion below.

Even though each of these points guided the researcher's process and help shape the research project's quality, each point cannot be of equal importance throughout all phases. Coghlan and Brydon-Miller argue that the key ought to be that each transparency must exist on which point was given priority (2014, p. 668). In this thesis, a priority will be given to *significance*. I believe that I have outlined the significance, and, therefore, proved quality in the later chapters. Though, these later chapters were dependent on reflexivity, actionability, and the contributions to practice. Ultimately, the outcomes of this project have been focused on the volunteering practice. However, the plurality of approaches also promoted growth in my academic practice. As we move to later chapters, there were two levels of actionability, (1) at my individual level and (2) at the system level.

### *3.7.1 When Considering Quality and Rigor, What Objectives are Different for Action Researchers?*

Additionally, action researchers do not aim for the same objective, replication, and falsification research results that positivist seek. One reason is that action researchers typically cannot produce social environments that allow for repeatability. As a result, research results are examined through applicability, consistency, and neutrality. The aim is that trustworthiness can be established using four qualities: (1) credibility, (2) transferability, (3) dependability, (4) confirmability (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014, p 690)

Creditability is often supported by convincing evidence that leads to a problem solution. Many times, this occurs through many iterative inquiry cycles. Creditability

can also arise when the consequences of the actions are followed. Because of this project's time-bound nature, actions will not be able to be followed for an extended period of time. However, creditability can also occur through reflexive evaluation. In this project, I believe that convincing evidence and reflexivity will be critical components for creditability (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014, p 690).

Action research is often criticized for lack of transferability because some argue that generalization is problematic from a single case. I am taking Lewin's approach that it is learning and knowledge that is transferable. The aim is for improvement through learning. When some form of learning occurs, whether at the individual, organizational, or both levels, a form of generalization or transferability must have occurred (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014, p 786). I believe chapter six is evidence of this as I show my conversion with a former volunteering manager. Learning occurred. Learning was transferred.

Dependability demands that generated knowledge will later operate successfully. Essentially, aspects of the study should outline how the knowledge will be dependable more than once and usually supported through iterative inquiry cycles. When the individual and, or the organization learns, change occurs. Within a rigorous action research project, the generated knowledge should be repeatable on some level in the future (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014, p 690). On the individual level (chapter five), I believe the generated knowledge will be repeated. On the organizational level, I believe that the repeatability of the generated knowledge will greatly be influenced by the system (as I hope my themes reveal).

Even though it is difficult to repeat action research projects, confirmability expects processes to be reconstructed. Documentation should be available to audit. Even if the auditors lack understanding within the social setting, they can confirm the data and procedures were adequately conducted (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014, p 690). I have ensured that the research is confirmable by maintaining primary interviews, narrative analysis documents, iterative coding documents, and any other notes used as evidence within this project. I believe the audio recordings and coding documents provide critical support for comfortability.

### 3.8 Reflections of Research Design and Methodology

As I highlighted at the beginning of this chapter, I have had to routinely remind myself to focus on what type of research is appropriate to answer my research question given my circumstances (Hakim, 2000). Many times, I found myself searching for an outline, a script, and “the how” to conduct my research (Hakim, 2000), which resulted in the struggle of form over function. However, my research design continued to evolve throughout the thesis. During the data collection process, my first set of interviews became pivotal to help concrete the idea Hakim (2000) describes. As I will show in the following chapter, my circumstances rarely look like I initially thought they would.

#### 3.8.1 Reflection on actionable knowledge

One struggle that persisted during the first portion of this project is the role that action and actionable knowledge would play within this thesis. As an executive and practitioner, I had a deep desire for this thesis to generate a large-scale action plan and that I would get to see that plan executed. Simply, I wanted to “find the right answer” to our “problem.” I was falling into one of the very first traps that I learned at the beginning of my doctoral journey. That trap, and lesson learned, was that program knowledge was limited, and so seeking the “correct answer” would likely lead to limited outcomes and limited knowledge creation. That lesson helped me consider how to start being in a problem (Johns *et al.*, 2013; Pedlar, 2008).

So, as I struggled with over-emphasizing this project's action, I realized that the actionable knowledge would look different than I initially desired, and I also acknowledge that such emphasis was limiting. During my first cycle of inquiry, I discovered that the action needed in this project was one that should emphasize reshaping our reality within the context of our organization (Taylor *et al.*, 2008). Rather than “finding the correct solution,” I shifted my focus to my practice and other volunteers' practice within our organization. As a result, using Torbert's (2006) four-parts of speech, I concluded that (1) framing, (2) advocating, (3) illustrating, and (4) inquiring fit the type of actions that the projects needed. The reason is that rather than a manipulative mode of inquiry, one in which I am unconsciously seeking and desiring, I could move toward a mutually transforming action inquiry (Torbert, 2006, p. 9). This action modality was leveraged using *narrative inquiry* to collect data and was further

supported by *first-person action research* and autoethnography.

Though Torbert's typology of four types of speech is focused on how we speak, speaking is action (2006, p. 9). As Weick (1995) highlights, as conversations occur, our realities are reenacted that iteratively and regularly reshape those realities. So, even as we become aware of how our actions lead to undesirable outcomes, our in-use frames often still prevent us from acting differently (Taylor *et al.*, 2008). Rather than focusing on seeking the "correct answer," I now understand that focusing on how these in-use frames will lead to greater long-term actionable knowledge, personally and organizationally. But ultimately, because of the journey of this thesis, the actionable knowledge for my own practice may, at times, overshadow that of the organization. Yes, I *engaged with ideas* and *tested the plausibility* of those ideas (Ramsey, 2014) for organizational action, but in the midst of that process that will be explained, my *attention* evolved.

### **3.9 Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I outlined the research design and the impact that the research design had on the action research cycles. I summarized the composition of the research participants and outlined data collection methods, (including the generation, capturing, analyzing, and interpretation of such data). I then focus on quality and rigor and conclude with my reflections on actionable knowledge.

In the following three chapters, I will provide evidence that steered the thesis toward three major themes. Each chapter will be bound in its separate *cycle of inquiry*. And where overlap between cycles exist and supports further evidence, I will highlight those moments. Each cycle, and therefore chapter, builds upon one another, and each cycle picks up a tool that was discussed in this chapter.

In chapter four, the first cycle provides a critical foundation. Because of the personal nature of the questions that literature raised in the previous chapter, I considered *narrative inquiry* as a vital first tool. As I entered my first interview, action inquiry (Torbert, 2006) and *first-person action research* (Marshall, 2016) were somewhat abstract ideas. Marshall's Dynamic Model of Action Research did seem aspirational. And in many ways, it very much remains aspirational. However, before I finished that first interview, *framing* and *inquiry* (Torbert, 2006) were shaping the next *cycle of*

*inquiry*. I hope those moments can be seen in the data in the following chapter. Those conversations stirred up my own experiences as well.

So, in chapter five, the second cycle builds scaffolding toward something richer. I pick up tools that borrow from autoethnography (Holman Jones *et. al*, 2016) and *writing as inquiry* (Marshall, 2016). As I touched on earlier, I did not rely on research journals. Rather, as I wrote about themes that were emerging from the narratives so that I could prepare for the second set of interviews, I struggled to exclude my experiences. At first, I was reluctant. But as my experiences continued to creep into all of my writing, I embraced it.

And the third cycle, in chapter six, where I discuss *testing the plausibility* (Ramsey, 2014), is the apex of the thesis. At some point in this third cycle, I end up using all of the tools discussed above. I get stories from an executive and a manager. Action inquiry (Torbert, 2006) and *first-person action research* (Marshall, 2016) were foundational. And without inquiry, with others and in writing, I likely would have not climbed to the top of the mountain. The thesis might have appeared complete, but I would have hidden the most critical part from myself. However, before that conversation can be had, the foundation needs to be laid.

## Chapter 4 - Data Analysis and Findings of Major Themes

### 4.1 Introduction

As a reminder, the thesis' primary aim began by examining *how do volunteers manage a nonprofit through a leadership transition*. In this empirical chapter, I will discuss the analyzed data and the findings, or themes, from such data that occurred within the *first cycle of inquiry*. Since the majority of the gathered data for this project leaned heavily upon narrative inquiry, I will begin this discussion by first providing a brief overview of the interviews, of the interviewees, and of how the themes manifested from the data. One goal of these overviews is to provide a context for the discussion of the themes that will follow. Another goal is to show that, though the major themes appear neat and glaring, each theme only materialized after listening to several volunteers' stories and synthesizing their experiences and codes together.

There were numerous codes that arose from volunteers' stories and interviews. These codes were sorted, and some of these codes were combined to form larger themes. And as I will show why later, other codes were disregarded. The criteria and reasoning for how these decisions were made will also be in the discussion.

Afterward, I will discuss the three major themes that the data pointed to. Each theme will begin with an overview. Then, I will provide the data from the narrative interviews that led me to that theme. And, finally, I will discuss the importance or implication of the theme. The major themes that I discuss below are (1) Importance of Bifurcating Volunteers into Two Groups, i.e., Parental and Non-Parental Volunteer (2) Impact of the Grief Cycle (3) Importance of Redevelopment. The discussions of the themes below may appear mechanical at times in this chapter. The purpose is to distinguish the *first cycle of inquiry* that focused more on analytical data from the *second cycle of inquiry* (next chapter) that introduced more emotive data.

After I discuss the major themes, I will highlight some themes that were disregarded. I initially named these themes as *minor themes*. However, I found *minor* to be a disingenuous label. As I will elaborate later, these themes could have important implications with different research questions if this project's scope was broader. As a



result, I labeled this section *discussion of secondary themes*. The goal of this section is to further show how I relied on data to develop the major themes and how the data did suspend these secondary themes for the purposes of the scope of this project.

Lastly, absent in this chapter is most of the *first-person* data. The primary reason is that this chapter is constrained to discussing the *first cycle of inquiry*. As I will show in the next chapter, the *first-person inquiry* influenced the project in such a significant manner that it evolved into its own discrete cycle of inquiry. As a result, in the next chapter, I re-discuss the three major themes from a *first-person* perspective using *first-person* data. As pointed out in Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, the idea of a cycle is a convenient means to accentuate the connectedness between the moments that one made sense of the situation (2014, p. 235). So, at the end of this chapter, I discuss the importance of those moments that helped define this particular cycle of inquiry and then link its importance to the following cycle.

#### **4.2 Interviews Context**

While I attempted to frame the focus of initial interview questions and dialogs on *how the volunteers managed the non-profit during times of employee leadership transition*, I also promoted an environment for the volunteers to *relive* and *retell* their own stories. I did this by (1) asking open-ended questions, (2) probing deeper in the parts of the story that the volunteers seemed to indicate were important to them, and (3) rarely redirecting the conversation when volunteers' stories, unexpectedly, "got off track".

Frankly, I followed this path because the approach and literature that fit this research problem urged for listening rather than questioning. And so, in many cases, the volunteers' stories connected to the overall direction of the research. However, in some cases, their stories veered "way off." For example, in a conversation with James, he got so "off track" that I initially considered the last half of our conversation irrelevant. While I was outwardly shaking my head with a smile, internally, I was thinking "What a waste of time. He is just venting."

However, I, luckily, continued to probe and started to listen to James. I wanted him to feel heard and wanted our conversations to build an atmosphere of trust. As Josselson recommended, I believe that this posture of seeking to listen helped me to stay in

moments that were genuine, significant, and meaningful aspects of the volunteers' life (2007, p. 539). Ultimately, many of these moments were some of the most critical dialogs within my data.

Additionally, the reason that I highlight this, other than to provide context, is because some of the data below seem out of place until the moment that it does not. I attempted to show the full picture while also focusing on the critical moments. Often, I had to choose between one or the other. As a result, at times, I deemed some of the recorded dialogs below needed to focus on the evidence at the cost of the context. For example, when Addie spoke about "purpose" and James spoke about "place to call home," I chose to use their words as evidence at the cost of the context.

As I mentioned in chapter three, these were some moments where my biases, assumptions, and interpretations influenced the *flow of data*. As a result, my fingerprint on the data cannot be removed (Holman Jones *et. al*, 2016; Kim, 2015). Those fingerprints are present when I chose to listen and when I steered the dialog elsewhere. They are on the evidence below as I focused on some parts but may have lacked clarity or attentiveness to synthesize other parts of the conversations. And as I will show in the following chapters, I was heavily drawn to the evidence that induced *first-person* inquiry.

Lastly, whether the moments were tangential or not, the posture of remaining in the moment also supported how the thesis focus shifted. I would argue that the seeds of attending to the volunteers were planted in this first cycle of inquiry. Below, I will highlight some of those moments. However, as I pointed out in the previous chapters, I did not fully grasp the complete focal shift until the third cycle of inquiry. There, I began to understand that the thesis had become about asking *how can volunteers be attended to and cared for*. As a result, the data was collected through the lens of seeking to ask my initial research question.

### **4.3 Interviewees**

I invited volunteers to participate in this research who would be considered *full-time volunteers*. Full-time volunteers are defined as those volunteers who participate at all three of the primary weekly scheduled events. At the time of inviting volunteers to participate, there were eight volunteers (excluding myself) in the population that would

meet such requirements. The primary reason that I focused on this group is that they are the volunteers who have experienced multiple cycles of employed leadership turnover. None of the *non-full-time volunteers* were present during multiple employed leadership changes. Ultimately, six participants agreed to be a part of this project. Of those agreeing to participate in the project, four volunteers have experienced several cycles of employed leadership change. The two other participants (Harry and Trent) had only experienced partial change cycles. As a result, a greater portion of our dialog together tended to focus on their relationships with the students and so was more outside of the scope of the project. By contrast, my dialog with two participants' (Addie and Michelle) tended to drift toward problems that they have been facing since the last leadership turnover event and how it compared to their previous experiences. And lastly, my conversations with James and Leia tended to focus on some of their earliest leadership turnover experiences. As a result, some volunteers' voices will be more predominant in the data at particular moments and will be scarcer at other moments.

Additionally, I found that the stories from the volunteers encouraged observing the data as two distinct groups. The first group was those volunteers who had experienced partial leadership change cycles. Meaning, these volunteers had arrived after a paid leader departed, and so they had little or no connection to the youth before the departure. The second group were those that experienced one or more complete leadership change cycles. Though I had not previously considered how different these groups were at the planning stage, these groups quickly emerged during the first set of interviews. The data generated from the group who experienced one or more change cycles led to strong thematic redundancy, an important criterion outlined earlier in chapter three. The data from the group who had only experienced partial change cycles was discrete, unique to those individuals, and lacked such redundancy.

I further subdivide the group of four volunteers (who experienced full cycles of leadership change) based on the emerging data. Two of these volunteers are parents of teenaged students who participate within the organization. As a result, I have termed these volunteers as parental volunteers. The other two volunteers may have been parents, but their children were too young to participate in this segment of the organization. As a result, I have termed these volunteers as non-parental volunteers. Unlike with the two volunteers who only experienced partial leadership change, the

thematic redundancy persisted even after this second categorization. The experiences between the two groups often seemed to contrast with one another. But as I hope to show below, the two groups (parental and non-parental volunteers) combine to create a fuller picture.

## 4.4 Themes

### 4.4.1 Overview of How the Themes Emerged

In this section, I will give a brief overview of the coding process and how the themes materialized through that process. Then, I will outline the criteria of why other codes were not used for this project even if sufficient data existed that led to other themes. In the case that a theme materialized but was not deemed a major theme, I labeled those as secondary themes and discuss those further at the end of this chapter.

The coding perspective that I used was what Saldana (2016) would refer to as *pragmatic eclecticism*. Saldana defines *pragmatic eclecticism* as when the researcher chooses the coding method based on what is most appropriate to the research study. Though, Saldana argues that this does not mean that avoiding any coding method is ever likely appropriate because a well-fitted method will always pay-off when compared to no coding method at all (2016, p 70). Riessman (1993) also argues that transcribing is a critical part of analyzing the data. I found this to be true within this project as I will show below when I discuss each theme. There, I will show how some stories by different volunteers joined together to help me clearly see an overall theme. And as I will show in the next chapter, transcribing and analyzing promoted self-reflection that led me to a transformation as a volunteer.

As I initially began coding, I fell into the trap of *code proliferation* (Saldana, 2016, p 78-79). I was overly splitting and had hundreds of splits and was not anywhere near finished with my first cycle of coding. So, to prevent being overwhelmed and impair my ability to identify the critical data, I changed two things.

**First**, I separated and arranged the transcriptions into stanzas following the Labov's Model (Riessman, 1993; Saldana, 2016). **Second**, though I maintained splitting narrative stanzas for the entire transcript, I moved to function as a *lumper* for themes, rather than a *splitter* (Saldana, 2016, p 23-24). Reflecting back on this transition, I saw

yet another influence that promoted this change. As I analyzed the data and listened and relistened to the interviews, the resonance of the volunteers' stories began influencing my *first-person writing*, and, in turn, the *first-person writing* influenced coding.

Additionally, this transition to a lumpner from a splitter led me to focus on (1) using selective code repeatedly (2) subsuming codes into broader categories as I coded (3) attempting to code the most essential elements of the data corpus (Saldana, 2016, p 79-80). Ultimately, this process change resulted in approximately one-hundred and fifty codes. I also continued to re-listen to each interview. Since "people lead storied lives" (Riessman, 1993), my goal was to develop deep connections to the stories and obtain insights through listening and relistening (Dewalt, Musante, and Dewalt, 2011). This allowed me to better understand how some facets of the volunteers' stories connected to other volunteers' stories. For example, as shown below in the theme data sections, volunteers saying that they were tired often was about the volunteers grieving some loss that was fatiguing, and as I illustrate in Appendix 3, joy and personal agendas helped me better understand new motivating factors and conflict that supported the parental / non-parental volunteer theme.

Using process coding, I filtered the more than 150 codes into the approximately twenty codes found in Appendix 3. I filtered out any codes for the following reasons:

(1) The codes were highly contextual to the individual and were outside the scope of this project's goals.

(2) The codes fit inside the project's themes but lacked specificity for me to use the data.

(3) The codes fit this project's aim but contradicted the "majority" of participants. These codes may even have validity and could lead to additional knowledge within our organization. However, the potential cost to further investigate these contradictions was deemed greater than the potential reward.

As I mentioned in the introduction, the themes that I ultimately arrived at were (1) the importance of two volunteering groups, i.e., parental and non-parental volunteer, (2) the impact of the grief cycle, and (3) the importance of redevelopment. Next, I will describe these themes in detail, show the data that led me to these conclusions, and discuss their importance.

## **4.5 First Theme: The Two Different Groups of Volunteers**

### *4.5.1 Overview*

One theme that I nearly discounted was that volunteers can be segregated into two distinct groups. I ultimately consider this one of the most important themes in this project. *See my discussion of why I deem this important below.* I have labeled these two groups: (1) parental volunteers (2) non-parental volunteers. The parental volunteers are those who volunteer and who have children that are part of the group. Non-parental volunteers are those who volunteer but do not have children that are part of the group.

Even though I have seen many parental volunteers come and go throughout the years, I never really considered how and why parental volunteers and non-parental volunteers may be different than one another. From the data, it appears that parental volunteers and non-parental volunteers may often be motivated differently and that each group may struggle with one another for power and influence. I found this new recognition important for several reasons: (1) volunteering conflict can lead to non-parental volunteering turnover if non-parental volunteers believe that they lack a voice and that the power dynamics conflict with volunteering motivations, (2) each of these volunteering groups seem to be motivated, engaged, and attached differently, (3) conflict between these two groups can shape the mentor-mentee relationship. And more importantly, long-term volunteering instability likely leads to a cycle of mentors and mentee attrition. Next, I will outline the data that I used for these conclusions.

### *4.5.2 Parental and Non-Parental Narrative Data*

The repetitive nature that these groups appeared in the data and the emphasis that participants gave it in their stories were the two main reasons that I ultimately considered these groups important. Every participant indirectly discussed these groups. Despite my initial questions being directed at how the volunteers managed the non-profit when an employed leader departed the organization, each participant eventually discussed this topic in the form of finding joy (parental parents), being fatigued by conflict (mostly non-parental parents), and seeking and experiencing stability within the organization. Non-parental volunteers discussed conflicts that they have experienced with parental volunteers, though, the non-parental volunteers did not directly acknowledge that their conflict was with volunteers who had children

participating as students. They did directly discuss how some volunteers attempted to control how activities operated at the benefit of their children. On the other side, parental volunteers talked about how meaningful it was to volunteer when their kids began to participate as a youth or the obligation they felt to continue volunteering until their children aged out of the youth.

An example of the first appearance of these groups was when I first spoke with Addie. I asked her to tell me about and describe what it was like for her after a paid leader departed the organization. Within minutes of telling me about her feeling “blindsided,” “confused,” and “taken back” by the departure, she quickly shifted her focus to a conflict that she had been experiencing. I probed:

**Me:** How does conflict affect you as a volunteer?

**Addie:** I think it burns you out quickly

**Me:** Can you describe that for me?

**Addie:** I think you have volunteers going behind one of the leader’s back and talking to students about his decisions instead of going to him [one of the leaders]. They [these parental volunteers] were creating dissension among students. [Addie was explaining this during a ten-day mission trip to New York].

They [meaning a group of parental volunteers] questioned who was in charge. There were ultimately two leaders who both thought that they were in charge of the trip, so there was disagreement with them. You had some adults and students who were following one leader while tuning out the other leader. Then, you also had other adults and students who were trying to make decisions on their own because they wanted to do something else. It was a disaster. It was frustrating. The trip felt like one big argument instead of something purposeful. After coming back from that, I felt like just being fed up with the entire thing, and I wondered if it was worthwhile to even volunteer.

**Me:** So, is it worthwhile to still volunteer?

**Addie:** [after a long pause] At this point in time, I would say, mostly likely, yes. But just three or four months ago, I would probably have said no.

**Me:** What has changed now?

**Addie:** I think stepping away from some things have been helpful. Just removing myself from some aspects of volunteering. Time and distance have helped. There is a sense of obligation. There is the thought of "if I don't do it, who will". And ultimately, there are students that need people to help, so I feel like I would be letting them down if I didn't [volunteer]. But, I think the biggest thing is time and distance away from that trip [the New York mission trip].

When I was speaking to Addie and listening to her experiences and frustrations about her recent trip, I was focused more on her fatigue. I did not quite see at the time that the groups that she was referring to actually segregated into parental and non-parental volunteers. I also did not realize at the time that my focus was shifting. In my question, "is it still worthwhile to still volunteer" though, I recognize how I was repositioning away from managing and toward the people. With the help of other stories below, it also became clearer what Addie was talking about. Her stories also highlighted how the mentor-mentee relationship was affected. The volunteers, the persons, were being affected. Students began to "choose sides." Also, as Addie clarified in our discussion, some volunteers [parental] desired to spend time touring New York City with their children and friends. Some other volunteers [non-parental] were motivated differently. This conflict even made Addie disengaged and had her questioning whether it was even worth her sacrifice to volunteer.

Michelle also told me about these two groups but indirectly.

**Me:** So, [when volunteering], what has robbed you of joy?

**Michelle:** I think honestly, when I approached some of the leaders [volunteer leaders] about some of our students not feeling welcome and being told that is their problem.

[A pause] . . . not seeing those adults out for all students but for select ones.

[another pause] . . . I guess the other thing is that I am just tired. I've been doing this for nine years straight, so some of that is that too.

Like Addie, the volunteer leaders that Michelle was referring to were parental volunteers who were attempting to direct activities that were focused on their children and their children's friends. Again, here, Michelle talked about how motivations were



different, how it affected our relationships with other students, and how it made her doubt whether she wanted to continue volunteering. Unfortunately, at this point in my interviews, I was still focusing on the fatigue and joy that I was hearing and was missing these volunteering groups. It was the conversations with parental volunteers that actually helped define these groups because of the contrast of the conversations.

During our first conversation, Leia was telling me stories about some of the significant paid leadership transitions that she had experienced over her years. Many of these stories were from the 1990s and early 2000s (her first-decade volunteering). As she explained the struggles and told the pain of these early leadership transitions, she also talked about the joys of volunteering and what made continuing to volunteer worth it. So, at this point, I probed:

**Me:** When have you been most happy [volunteering]?

**Leia:** hmm, probably when my boys got old enough [to join the youth]. They have been dragged around for so long. Even when they were little, little kids, they were up here [at the organization when Leia was volunteering]. But to see them actually participate, I think that was when I was the happiest.

Leia has currently volunteered for the youth longer than any other active volunteer in the organization. She has interacted with thousands of students over the years. Leia also had spent half an hour telling stories, much of which, had occurred fifteen to twenty years ago. But, as I asked her about what made her most happy volunteering, she moved to the present. She held a large grin upon her face as she spoke and said that her happiest memory was the moment when she transitioned from a non-parental volunteer [for at least fifteen years] to a parental volunteer. When she told me about what motivated her to continue volunteering and to struggle through those leadership transitions, she talked about the relationships with the students. But, as we discussed her more recent experiences, what makes her happy now, and what drives her to volunteer now, her motivations now seem to be different. She speaks about being able to experience the group with her kids. In the next section, I will show more data from James that supports how parental volunteers are more likely to have different motivations than non-parental volunteers.

#### 4.5.3 Importance of These Groups

As I briefly outlined in this section's overview, I think there are several important implications for identifying these groups. The **first implication** that I will expand upon here is that volunteering conflict can lead to non-parental volunteering turnover if non-parental volunteers feel that the power balance is weighted too heavily against their motivations for volunteering. For example, Michelle and Addie, two of the most tenured non-parental volunteers, have since struggled to stay involved in volunteering because they began to feel that some of the parental volunteers were over-controlling the organization.

I initially framed what I was hearing within their stories as volunteering fatigue. Even though I do not think this is an incorrect term, I now believe that it was too vague and too broad to describe the subtleties of what they were experiencing. Volunteering fatigue may have been the state that they were in during the interview, but parental / non-parental volunteer conflict appears to be one of the drivers of the fatigue.

I do not have sufficient data to know how much of their volunteering fatigue was caused by this conflict, but Michelle has stopped volunteering completely and does not have plans to return to volunteering. Addie says that she may return to volunteering sometime but said that she does not want to commit to any specific time frame. When I have spoken to each of them, this “group” conflict and their lack of utility by the current paid leader were primary reasons to cease to volunteer.

On the flip side, if the power balance between volunteers begins to shift too heavily toward the non-parental volunteers, *can this conflict increase parental volunteer turnover?* The short answer is that I lack sufficient data to answer this question. However, as I will show later in this chapter, parental volunteers seem to be “stickers” more so than non-parental volunteers. Meaning, if the conflict becomes stressful to each group, parental volunteers’ motivational and engagement levels are correlated to their children who participate in the organization. As a result, it seems from the data presented below that those parental volunteers are more likely to remain involved despite greater stress.

The **second implication** is that each of these volunteering groups seems to be motivated, is engaged, and is attached differently. Each participant’s language in their

stories lead me to begin comparing these two groups' motivation, engagement, and attachment. According to the data that I will show below, parental volunteers are more motivated by their kids. Non-parental volunteers must find motivation elsewhere, often in their relationships mentoring other kids or in their relationships with other volunteers. James calls this "feeling wanted, needed, and loved." He talked about his experiences of volunteers becoming energized and engaged when they feel more wanted, more needed, and more loved.

During the interviews, the non-parental volunteers seemed to regularly use this language of desiring to feel wanted, needed, and loved. Parental volunteers, however, only used this language when they retold stories from early in their volunteering days when they were non-parental volunteers. I think the shift in language is because the parental volunteers attach more to their children than they attach to the organization, while non-parental volunteers must attach elsewhere. In the participants' case, they seemed to attach to the organization, their mentees, or other adult volunteers.

But, I think James's and Michelle's language really helped to clarify these differences. Before these interviews, I had not realized how "tired" of volunteering that James likely was. He served in so many capacities that I have taken his involvement for granted. But, he revealed to me that he felt tired of volunteering.

He told me, "So, while this is part of my life, there are other things that I could be doing, that I am not. So, you do sacrifice as a volunteer giving up your time." Also James lists all of the times during the week that he feels obligated to come volunteer in the organization. This was much different than our first conversation though.

That first time that he and I spoke, James talked about how volunteering had brought him joy, even though, at times, he spoke of the sorrows. As we talked about organizational change, he framed his experiences mostly as when he was a non-parental volunteer. He sounded energized by those stories. He told me how when he "first saw kids [positively] impacted" that he "wanted to grow it [meaning the youth]. "I wished more kids could be here," he told me. Like the other non-parental volunteers who told me their stories, he was engaged by mentoring students, but that is no longer the case.

"I will honestly say that one thing that keeps me around now is my kid" James told me. "There are sometimes, I am like just [James takes a long exhale],

“I sat there, come in from work, and I am like, I don't want to go [volunteer]? I just want to sit here [in my chair at home]. I am tired” he said. And apparently, James was tired. It was more than a year after James and I had this conversation that his youngest child graduated. As soon as that happened, James *faded away*.

Michelle described being motivated because she wanted to “make a difference.” She said that it was important that the students could have someone that they could “trust” and that “they had someone who will listen to them.” Much of our conversations continued to come back to this point and her describing what stood in her way to feel wanted, needed, and loved (as James would say).

During organizational change, she described how she wanted to “be the one stable thing” in the kids' life at the organization. However, the conflict between the parental and non-parental volunteers seemed to make her feel that she couldn't be successful at being the stable one for her mentees. She told me that “there was a power struggle,” most volunteers “weren't well informed,” and her kids didn't feel welcome.

Michelle said, “This is going to sound weird. But, I had a kid who was at two different big events with me over the past year [she paused].

This is going to sound sad and weird at the same time. But she told me that I was one of the few who made her feel welcome. It gave me joy that I made her feel welcome, but it broke my heart at the same time.”

Like Addie, most of the kids that Michelle mentored left, and she lost much of what she was attached to. Early in our first conversation, Michelle told me, “If it wasn't for the students, I would quit.” Unfortunately, Michelle did lose many of her mentees. And after nearly a decade of volunteering, she *faded away*.

The **third implication** is that conflict between these two groups can influence the mentor-mentee relationship. Even though Michelle alluded to this in the data that I outlined above, I think Addie's experience on the New York mission trip discussed above really showed how this conflict influenced volunteering and her relationships.

As I outlined above, she described the “dissension among the students” during that trip. The conflict between the volunteers created factions where volunteers and students split. It created social groups and territories that Addie had not really needed to navigate

before as a volunteer. Addie then compared this conflict that occurred to the lack of conflict in the paid leadership change event that she experienced more than 10 years previously. She told me that “in both cases, there was a sense of uncertainty.” But in her first experience of leadership turnover, she described it as “the best-case scenario.” She continued,

“I felt like everyone was on the same page and trying to do what was best for the students [a pause] . . . not only keeping things going, but we were improving upon the programs that were in place before. We were really creating something new, and everyone was doing what was needed, without complaints or reservation.

[This last instance] things kind of unraveled, in some way. I think there were issues brewing under the surface that the [paid] leader had been able to control. Once he was gone, there were a lot of personal agendas that came to the forefront. It created friction between the volunteers. I think the group, as a whole, took a step back and created an environment that would be tough to recover.

I think it seemed that volunteers weren’t involved in the process. In sitting down [with the volunteers], saying, this is what is happening, these are the gaps, these are the things that we need to continue. There were just a lot of questions about what was going to happen. Who was going to be in charge of what? It was very disjointed. Instead of everyone coming together to do what was needed or best, I think that is where you had an opportunity for personal agendas to really take hold.”

Examining the social groups conflicts is beyond the scope of this research thesis, and I lack sufficient data to consider any other possible social groups within our organization that also could impact the mentor-mentee relationship. Also, another limitation of this study is that I lack sufficient data to understand the extent that conflict between these groups impacts the mentor-mentee relationships. To Addie and Michelle, this conflict had been significant. However, since the focus of this research was not on student turnover, there could be any number of other factors that affected their relationship with their mentees.

I highlight those limitations because it is important to our organization to understand why parental and non-parental volunteers may have major conflicts. Both volunteer and student attrition may likely follow such conflict. However, I lack sufficient data to draw

additional conclusion.

## **4.6 Second Theme: Continuous Cycle of Grief**

### *4.6.1 Overview*

Another theme that arose is the state of grief that can affect volunteers. As I will show in the data section for this theme, Leia's story helped me see how this cycle manifests itself in our volunteering group. It seems that some of the volunteers felt trapped within this continuous cycle of grief. I labeled the cycle that I heard as a *perpetual grieving cycle*. Even though Leia's story was just the catalyst for the theme, I heard it in all the volunteers' stories. Leia's story was also a pivotal moment that I could point back to where I recognized that the focus was shifting to the volunteers and away from the practice of management.

As I will show below from the data, this grieving cycle often begins when the paid leader leaves. Some volunteers grieve the loss that occurred from this leader's departure. From the conversations and stories that I heard, grief could originate from (1) the loss of their relationship with the leader, (2) the volunteers' perceived loss that the students will incur, (3) actual loss of relationships with students, (4) and loss of *stability*. Even though, over the years, some volunteers wanted particular leaders to leave, there seemed to be some loss that occurred within someone's story.

Furthermore, over the next fifteen to eighteen months, volunteers will take on different leadership roles and attempt to build a stronger community with those people that remain. At various change events over the years, volunteers usually, but not always, spoke of how a stronger community was achieved. At other times, though, the community that existed before the employee leader's departure weakened even further. *See how the volunteers describe this below.*

The *grieving cycle* is *perpetual* because of how change continues. For the volunteers that I spoke with, it seemed that by the time they processed and adjusted their grief from the previous leader exiting the organization, a new leader is hired. For the participants that I spoke with, this change seemed to cascade them into another grieving cycle. Though the participants always spoke highly of a newly hired leader, they seemed to experience new grief, such as (1) a new leader potentially changing the community that was built (2) adjusting the roles that volunteers took on when a paid leader was absent,

and (3) potentially changing the relationships that volunteers had with specific youth.

#### 4.6.2 *Perpetual Grieving Cycle Data*

As I mentioned above, Leia's story helped me uncover this perpetual grieving cycle. As she and I were talking about leadership change, I asked her to tell me about some of the changes that she had experienced. Since we have experienced many changes together, I expected somewhat to hear one of the stories of change that I had experienced with her. Yet she only told a single story about an event that was over two decades old. She initially began her story in general terms, but she paused for a moment, and then transitioned to a change that was important to her. She spoke of her relationships and described the loss vividly, and she spoke of it as still having an emotional connection to that part of her life. Leia said,

“When the leader leaves [a pause], when Willie Davidson left, it was like a funeral.”

She told me how she “was sad,” but she followed it up with, “he had a good connection with the kids. Everything was going well.” I sensed that I could hear her reflections on the grief that she experienced. Willie Davidson meant something to her. I could hear that, and she grieved for that loss.

However, as other volunteers have mentioned, Leia said that she “definitely [grew] closer to the kids.” And as the students and volunteers grow closer, another change is near. As Leia describes, “It is hard when one leader leaves and another comes in and changes things. Then they leave, and someone else comes in to change things which aren't like the old way. The kids will come to me and say ‘we don't do it that way, and [they] don't like change. It is hard being the go-between person. They come to me as a leader and ask, ‘why are we doing it this way.’” And for the volunteers, this cycle of loss continues. It was this moment that I recall as defining where the thesis was shifting towards. “It was like a funeral”, Leia said. *Is this about management, or is this about something richer that I was a part of?*

#### 4.6.3 *Importance of the Perpetual Grieving Cycle*

I argue from the data below that the *perpetual grieving cycle* is important because (1) extreme volatility and a continuous state of grief can fatigue volunteers leading to

further organizational instability. Then, (2) from a place of conscious or unconscious self-preservation, volunteers may alter how they attach to the organization and to the students. This change in attachment can ultimately shift volunteers' motivation. (3) Supporting volunteers through their grief cycle may aid in the stabilization of the organization if volunteers do not feel the need for self-preservation.

Trent, James, Addie, and Michelle all indirectly discussed how instability leads to further instability. Even though each participant's story or comments were laden with their personality and experiences, as I probed, the kernel seemed to show that the amount of grief that volunteers could sustain was limited.

For example, Addie and I were talking about how tired she was of volunteering. As I discussed in the previous section, part of her fatigue seemed to be because of group conflict. However, it also seemed that part of her fatigue originated from a perpetual grieving cycle. As I began to understand this, I asked, hypothetically, how do you think volunteers would respond if the paid leader chose to leave the organization within the next week or two. I was trying to probe and dive deeper into her fatigue to better understand the complexities of it.

She immediately responded, "O, yeah. I think that there are already people who are considering not continuing to volunteer into next year and that would kind of cement their decision. It would be a natural exit." Within the context of our conversation, I interpreted Addie's comment as saying, *I am emotionally giving everything that I can at the moment. If any other instability occurs, I know that I will have to stop volunteering. I have nothing else to give.*

James responded this way when talking about change, "So, that's the most frustrating thing if you are the employee or volunteer is the new leader comes in, and kind of wants to implement new policies and changes too quickly, and all that ends up a lot of the time is people who are frustrated with people who are flexible, being so flexible that they are taken advantage of. And, I have felt like that through the years here too. Where it is like, umm, you get a new change in leadership, like "They're here. They'll hold it together" you know? [a pause] It's like, you know "it's not fair to do that to your volunteers" to always say "Y'all step up again."

I do not think James' and Addie's comments are about change itself but rather about



the effects of the perpetual grief that come from their feelings of continuous loss. For example, Addie even admitted in our conversation that it is not necessarily about the change. She said, “I am usually not a fan of change, but I feel like we need some pretty dramatic changes.” The dramatic change that she was referring to is a change to finding stability and finding a place. Addie told me that she did not know what the dramatic change would look like exactly, and that it would depend on the leader who was hired. But she said that the change needed to “move things in the right direction again” so that we can “know if we [meaning the volunteers] are helpful or not helpful.” “I think small group relationships are the reason that people showed up [she paused] . . . both adults and students,” but instability disrupted those relationships which led to more instability and more loss.

I also think this perpetual grieving cycle is opaquer in the volunteers' lives than is often expected, such as in Michelle's case. As I have mentioned before, Michelle sounded extremely fatigued during our conversations. This was a surprising tone to me. Even though I would consider Michelle a friend to our family, I had not recognized the extent of her fatigue before our conversations. She and my wife meet regularly to eat and socialize. Michelle visits our home, and she is part of our personal lives. Many times, we discuss the youth, but her openness about her fatigue must have been filtered. Once she had a different space to talk about how she felt, her exhaustion seemed much rawer than I had ever heard it. Michelle told me,

“When Hector left, that transition was hard, but at least we had Michael filling in. But throughout that process, it got a little harder because more transitions were going on that people didn't know about [pause]

from Michael leaving to not having Joel, a very abrupt shift. But, there was also a lack of leadership I felt like for a long time. And so that made it difficult for me personally because I felt like the students weren't [pause]

their needs weren't being met, but I didn't know how, I couldn't meet them. So, I was just doing the best that I could. There also wasn't a lot of leadership as far as for the adult leaders to tell us which direction we are going in, and it actually shifted like three or four times I felt like. Umm, it just got a little frustrating and confusing.”

**Me:** It seems that one of the motivating factors is the ability for you to be able

to connect with the youth.

Michelle quickly interrupts, “Yes.”

**Me:** But, through transition, I heard two things: (1) the transition disrupted your ability to connect, and (2) you weren’t supported in your ability to connect.

**Michelle:** I think those are fair.

**Me:** How would you rephrase those?

**Michelle:** The first one I don’t know that I would rephrase it, but I would elaborate as far as it disrupting my connection. Umm, because any time you go through a great transition, students, especially, need consistency whether they say they do or not. And so, when we lost Hector, a lot of our students left and found other places. And so I lost a lot of the connection that I had with several of them [the students]. I can name off about four or five right now from my small group that I led since seventh grade that no longer attend at [our organization] because they left to go other places specifically because Hector left [pause]

. . . . and they no longer had that leadership [meaning, to her, a relationship with Hector]. As far as support for connection, I think that is a good way of putting it because we lost some of [pause]

. . . . we were encouraged to connect and encouraged to do other things, but at the same time the students themselves lost that almost anchor point. [pause]

. . . They lost that stability and anchor that did hinder my ability to connect.”

Michelle spoke about her fatigue and about how instability hindered her relationships with students, however, she seemed to acknowledge that what would help her through these change events was maintaining or building relationships with students and having an “anchor” to provide a sense of stability. Michelle’s words paint part of the picture of why the *perpetual grieving cycle* is important.

Change will happen. Some, perhaps even many, volunteers and students will grieve the loss that occurred. However, without some sort of stability, or “anchor,” the loss has tended to lead to further loss with some of our volunteers. And, as Michelle and Addie have shown, there is a point when self-preservation must be prioritized. She has

talked to the leadership about “taking the next year off.” “I will still be around, but I will take a step back [she pauses] . . . just for my own mental health,” she told me. And so, both Michelle and Addie have stopped volunteering. And after reflecting on the entire thesis, I am left wondering how these volunteers would describe the extent to which the organization cared for and attended to their needs.

#### 4.6.4 *The Hidden Grief of Parental Volunteers*

As I discussed above, the grief of volunteers seems to tire volunteers, and if grief is unresolved, volunteers become so fatigued that they become more likely to seek self-preservation by stop volunteering. As I talked to some other volunteers, they alluded to a different type of grief that only a parental volunteer can experience, which is the grief that comes from losing your children from youth into adulthood. Though there are moments of celebrations, some parental volunteers are likely grieving those last moments that they have with their children before those children graduate and leave their house.

This type of grief could not be fully explored in this project, although this grief could have a major impact on how parental volunteers interact with non-parental volunteers and the organization, especially during moments of conflict.

On a recent mission trip, we had several parents who volunteered as chaperones who had never volunteered before. As we were making small talk, it struck me that they volunteered as chaperones because this trip was one of the last opportunities for them to spend *quality time* with children before they left their house. Their situation made me consider the cycle of some parental volunteers. I recalled how many parental volunteers are quiet and passive for the first couple of years when their children enter the group. But, as the parental volunteers’ children get older and as those volunteers *find their place* within the group, some appear to be more aggressive at pushing for a particular direction, as Addie’s and Michelle’s comments are reflected in previous data sections. There are several possible reasons for this shift. It could be that the parental volunteers (1) become more comfortable within the group and then feel comfortable about voicing their opinions. They may have (2) started grieving the upcoming loss of their children and feel the need to push for activities that they believe are important for their children. Or it could be (3) something entirely different or even some sort of

combination.

Even though this most recent trip accentuated how this grief of parental volunteers may influence the volunteers and how they operate the non-profit, the interview data showed how parental volunteers are motivated may be connected to how those volunteers grieve the changes of their children. In the literature, Alfes *et al.* (2016) argue how engagement is a positive influencer to help motivate volunteers. However, according to Ragsdell (2013), volunteers' engagement can quickly change between being engaged or disengaged based on outside factors. As a result, it is plausible that volunteers' children are a major influence of engagement and motivation. *See James' comments below.* As a result, when their children are involved in the group, some parental volunteers are highly engaged and highly motivated.

For example, I consider James a highly engaged and highly motivated volunteer. But listening to his comments, this motivation comes from somewhere different now than it did before he became a parental volunteer. James told me, "I will honestly say that one thing that keeps me around now is my kid. In a couple of years, it will be easier for me to say, you guys go ahead with it. There is a level of commitment that each of these parents put in because of their child. Now, when I was younger, like twenty-five, I had a lot more energy. I had the excitement of being around the kids and playing the same games. But as I get older, I am not really into the games."

James's volunteering motivations changed at some point from other youth towards his children. And when his last child graduates, he seems to have already been signaling in our conversations that he plans to stop volunteering. Even though this could not be explored further within this project, I think James' comment and the possibility of parental grief could be something important to investigate further. Redeveloping (*which I will expand upon in the next theme*) could be a critical component to help some parental volunteers reattach to the organization as they grieve and become partially unattached from part of their children's lives. And although this project lacked the data to support this theory, redevelopment could potentially help provide stability for the group by turning parental volunteers into non-parental volunteers and could potentially help to resolve a conflict between parental and non-parental volunteers. As I discuss in the next section, either way, redevelopment has a significant role to play in energizing

volunteers, reducing turnover, and maintaining stability.

#### **4.7 Third Theme: Volunteers Often Lack a Path Toward Redevelopment**

##### *4.7.1 Overview*

Each of the three prominent themes emerged from the data only after I (1) listened and relistened to the volunteers' stories and dialogs, (2) reflected on those conversations, (3) and consulted literature about what and how I was interpreting the data. These themes became more pronounced after I followed up with either the volunteers from their previous stories in their second interview and after I inquired others when *testing the plausibility* of those themes.

One theme that I continued to hear in the volunteers' stories but lacked the vocabulary to frame was volunteer redevelopment. Each volunteer discussed stories about times when volunteering brought them joy and times when volunteering felt like an obligation. I initially framed these conversations as *Volunteering Joy / Fatigue*. But as I continued to search from the vocabulary in what I was hearing, I concluded that *energized* and *fatigue* were outcomes that I was hearing. One reason I struggled with framing was that I was not asking what state, such as energized or fatigued, volunteers were operating in within their stories. My research questions were not focused on *what makes volunteers fatigued or energized* but rather focused on how volunteers should operate the non-profit. Indirectly, I was asking *how can volunteers continue to be energized*. And in hindsight, as my research focus continued to shift, I was asking *how can we care for these volunteers*.

If volunteers were grieving or were feeling fatigued, my disposition was that it was difficult for volunteers to stay energized and motivated. As I discussed in the grieving cycle section above, the data showed that volunteers sought support from the organization. If volunteers reach a point where they feel the need for self-preservation, they "*faded away*." Volunteers fading away also create more instability.

Rather than focusing on the need to energize volunteers, i.e., an outcome, literature helped me frame some of the volunteers' stories as seeking redevelopment, i.e., a potential solution. For example, Addie and Michelle both spoke about feeling that they lacked a place. See the next data section for the dialog and more information regarding how redevelopment is a potential solution to energizing volunteers and reducing

fatigue.

Additionally, as I highlighted in the previous section, the loss that parental volunteers feel is different, and so, redevelopment for parental volunteers could be more challenging. James and Leia both said that they were “tired.” Leia described it as saying, “it takes a lot of time to be a good volunteer especially when you work with students.” She told me that she did “enjoy students” but that under different circumstances that she would “probably not [volunteer] to the extent” that she does now.

#### *4.7.2 Redevelopment Data*

The desire for redevelopment cascaded throughout the data. And to a lesser extent, the data forced me to consider whether we also lacked development. For example, Harry told me a story about when he stopped volunteering at an organization before he came to our organization. He told me, “I enjoyed my experience in Pensacola, but my relationships weren’t in that group. The group in Pensacola wasn’t my number 1.” He explained that when he left, it was inconsequential. “It was more like, hey time’s up. I have another opportunity. See you later. I don’t think there was an emotional connection [there],” Harry said.

Even though Harry’s experience was different in our organization, it reminded me of the many other volunteers each year that cycle through for a single year or two never to be seen or heard of again. I was reminded of how those volunteers lacked a deeper connection and seemed to leave by saying, “Hey, times up.” I lack sufficient data to discuss any further whether our organization sufficiently develops volunteers. This is an area that could be important to investigate further. However, there is a lot of data to support that we lack redevelopment. From the following data, it could even be argued that redevelopment occurs haphazardly.

For example, when Leia experienced her first major leadership change, she told me during the transition that “It was hard. . . . There wasn’t a place for me. We didn’t know what we were supposed to do.” She continued to volunteer but she talked about how hard that it was to continue to do so. The relationships with the youth that she had developed seemed to be why she stayed. She told me how they “would have a group text and text almost every day, just something little. We would meet and go to Sonic and get ice cream or get coffee. We would just sit and talk . . . just about life and things

that they were dealing with. We were friends you could say.”

But, without that group and without a place, it is hard. Again, James would say that Leia may not feel “wanted, needed, or loved.” Leia described this last change of how hard it was. “I had a group that I started with as seventh graders. They graduated last year.” Rather than a purposeful redevelopment, Leia ended up helping with a group haphazardly. The “group of girls have been shuffled around and moved around,” she said. “I get joy from the group that I have now, but it’s not the same as *that* group.”

However, other volunteers experience loss and never find anything to replace it. That was where both Michelle and Addie were when we spoke. Michelle told me that “if it wasn’t for these students” that she “would quit.” Later, she told me that she felt “like Wiley Coyote who ran off the side of a cliff. I don’t have any support under me.” One potential reason that our organization does not focus on redevelopment is that since volunteers are not paid, it leads people to not consider how productive volunteers are. And James says, they don’t feel “needed.” Addie said that she thought “a lot of volunteers, their time, their service, are taken for granted.” In some regards, it sounds like redevelopment and productiveness are correlated, although I am not hearing the volunteers saying *the organization ought to focus on managing the non-profit as a for-profit business*. But, in Addie’s plea of, “I guess thinking that my time is making a difference somehow,” I hear the volunteers say *please help me feel that what I am doing matters*. I hear *take care of me as I try to care for others*.

#### 4.7.3 Importance of Redevelopment

Redevelopment is important because it is a path that may help to reduce volunteer turnover and help to provide stability to the organization. As volunteers indicated in our conversations, they are likely looking for a reason to continue to volunteer. Using James’ words, they are desiring to be “needed, wanted, and loved.”

When the volunteers felt needed and wanted, they felt energized despite their grief. Addie said that she wanted a “purpose” and a “direction.” James said that he wanted “to belong someplace,” a “place to call home.” Leia said that she “wouldn’t volunteer” if it didn’t bring her “joy.” Michelle told of how she felt wanted when students saw her out in public and chatted with her. Even if she only had brief encounters with some students, she said it is memorable whenever someone calls out to her, saying “O, you’re

that lady!” However, as the volunteers recalled the other occasions when they felt they lacked a place, they talked about how grief seemed to grow, and volunteering fatigue flourished. *See the previous data sections.* Redevelopment of volunteers seems to be at the center of whether volunteers feel that they “belong to someplace.” Additionally, since redevelopment appears to have been more haphazard in the past, this may be one explanation why parental volunteers stop volunteering as soon as their children graduate. *Could redevelopment help turn parental volunteers into non-parental volunteers after their children age out of the group? Could redevelopment support non-parental volunteers through disruptive change and help those volunteers work through their grief?* The previously presented data seems to indicate that, yes, the redevelopment will support non-parental volunteers. Though I do not have sufficient data to answer the former question, it is worth investigating further. And as the volunteers continue to repeat, lower volunteer turnover will provide more volunteer stability. And according to all participants, less instability is likely to directly remove a contributor to grief and fatigue. In Michelle’s words, people need “an anchor.”

#### **4.8 Discussion of Secondary Themes**

As I expand upon in chapter seven, the three major themes likely manifested because of the combination of analytical and emotive analysis. As Riessman (1993) recommended, I built a deep connection to the data by listening and relistening to the interviews. Because of this approach, and as the next chapter shows, I was more influenced by data that was routinely repeated and “well fitted” the majority of the stories (Saldana, 2016), by data that *resonated* with me, and by data that compelled me to *relive* my own stories. The latter influencers, *resonance and reliving*, are how I have interpreted *significance* (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014). Meaning, *are the themes generating meaningful and relevant knowledge* (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014)? I initially interpreted Coghlan and Brydon-Miller’s definition of *significance* exclusively aimed at the research question and organization. But as I showed myself becoming part of the research, my interpretation of *significance* broadened.

*Fatigue* and *conflict* are two secondary themes that I have already discussed above. There, I showed how I found the *parental/non-parental groups* more meaningful and relevant. Had Harry and Trent, who appear very little in this thesis, had spoken about



these themes, their stories could have shaped my interpretations. Also, had Leia's and James' words, shown in this chapter and the next, not triggered me to *relive* my own experience as a parental volunteer elsewhere, my interpretation of motivation, engagement, and attachment could have been very different. Based on Leia's and Michelle's stories regarding the leaders, my interpretation could have been leader-focused rather than student-child-focused as I considered motivation, engagement, and attachment.

Another secondary theme that could have significantly shifted the direction of this thesis was planning and preparedness. Even though Addie focused on a few related stories, codes did not appear repetitiously until I spoke with Harry and Trent. As shown by the timeline in Appendix 5, those interviews did not occur until a couple of weeks after I had spoken with the first four participants. Had I spoken with Harry and Trent first, my interpretations and the questions I asked later participants could have been very different. Rather than including emotive data, I may have continued only to include analytical data. However, as I show in the next chapter, I was already becoming part of the research by the time that I spoke with either Harry or Trent. As a result, their stories did not seem to fit what I was already experiencing.

Lastly, leadership and communication were two other secondary themes. Similar to planning and preparedness, the other interviews could have drastically influenced how I experienced the data. However, unlike with planning and preparedness, all volunteers briefly discussed leadership and communication. But as I listened to each volunteer when such comments arose, the themes never resonated with me. Comments seemed more mechanical, and participants rarely *relived* what leadership and communication could look like. Had I focused more on these themes or had more experience probing, they could have been more impactful. But as it stands, some of the most detailed accounts of leadership and communication looked like this when Addie told me, "I think the times that I have been happiest [volunteering] was when we had leaders who have given us a good sense of direction." Even then, her comment did not "fit" (Saldana, 2016) much of her other stories about the purpose and joy of volunteering. The comment seemed like an outlier to me, and it sounded like an answer to a puzzle (Pedlar, 2008).

In summary, had the research approach not fueled me to *relive* my own story, it is entirely likely that some of the secondary themes mentioned above would have been more important. However, even though I can neatly separate the *first cycle of inquiry* from the *second cycle of inquiry*, I show in Appendix 4, Figure 9, that both were remarkably intertwined. As a result, even though I can highlight moments that the data influenced me and moments that I likely influenced the data, the idea of untangling and forgetting those experiences seems impossible. The following chapters begin to embrace this interconnectedness.

#### **4.9 Chapter Summary and Linking to the Second Cycle of Inquiry**

This chapter's primary goal was to show the essential data that facilitated the discovery of the three themes by using narrative interviews. I initially began the interviews seeking answers to the primary research question and three sub-questions presented in chapter one. But rather than processes and management techniques, I found something else. Since these interviews were the first cycle of inquiry. I believe that I could have pushed forward toward focusing on processes and action plans in the second cycle. Yet, I also believe that it would have been disingenuous to my experiences had I done so. Learning would have still occurred, but I do not believe that the change, described later on, within me would have been as rich. I would have ignored what I was personally wrestling with, and therefore, likely stifled that change.

As a result, the generated ideas are more of a lens for volunteers to build their practice of managing the non-profit. The parental and non-parental identity is likely to heavily influence how some volunteers are motivated, how they will engage and commit to the department, and how they will attach to the organization. Failing to appropriately engage with volunteers in a manner that corresponds to the needs of their identity could be an obstacle to manage the non-profit. However, if leveraged appropriately, volunteers may have greater motivation, commitment, and engagement and, therefore, potentially making managing the non-profit easier.

Grief is another lens and obstacle that volunteer managers should consider. Because many volunteers continue to experience sizable change events, I have suggested that some of those volunteers are in a *perpetual grieving cycle*. Some volunteers may also recognize this grief as fatigue. If change continues to be a continuous and routine series

of events, which is likely, incorporating a means for volunteers to better progress through the grief could combat demotivation. Redevelopment is one such key channel. This theme intertwines the previous two themes and offers an actionable idea to support volunteers.

As I will discuss in the next chapter, redevelopment may be natural for some volunteers but difficult to obtain for others. Because the narrative stories stimulated something more within me, I will reexamine these stories from a *first-person* perspective and discuss the impact that these stories and themes had on me. There, I hope to show why ignoring how the narrative stories were impacting me would have created a less rich experience.

## Chapter 5 - First-Person Account Perspective

### 5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the aim is to rediscuss the three major themes from the previous chapter but from a first-person perspective by focusing on the second cycle of inquiry of this thesis. As shown in the Appendix 4 and shown below, this cycle was a response to the narrative interviews. As a result, in the sections below, I will incorporate first-person data to show the impact and importance of each theme from my perspective. The chapter attempts to show me *re-realizing* the research questions, not from afar but personally. It attempts to show me reevaluating what the thesis means, not to the organization but to me. While the research focus was shifting from managing the non-profit towards caring for the volunteers, I would describe this cycle of inquiry as the bridge between the seeds of attentiveness that were sown in the first cycle of inquiry and the manifestations and realizations of those seeds in the third cycle of inquiry. In short, this chapter begins to show the journey that the thesis is as much about me as it is about the organization.

So, the data in this chapter will be comprised of my reflections on the narrative data, my reflections on dialogs that I had with others about the potential implications of the theme, and even my reflections on my reflections. From an autoethnography perspective, I am both the instrument of data collection, part of the data itself, as well as the author. Some are skeptical of this method and any knowledge that is claimed to be generated (Jones, Adams, and Ellis, 2016, p. 256). As a result, it is my goal to show how the first-person directly influenced my practice.

To minimize the repetition of a significant portion of narrative data from the previous chapter, I aim to only reference contextual and pivotal comments that spurred first-person inquiry. New narrative data that was not presented in the previous chapter will, of course, be expanded on below and in more detail. As I will show, even though a significant amount of narrative data influenced my reflections, the conclusions and lessons learned in this chapter were shaped by my interpretations and experiences.

As in the previous chapter, I will begin discussing Bifurcating Volunteers into Two

Groups, i.e., Parental and Non-Parental Volunteer, followed by the Impact of the Grief Cycle, and, finally, the Importance of Redevelopment. Each thematic discussion begins with a brief *first-person* overview to help frame myself within the discussion. Next, I outline the data which is largely influenced by an autoethnography method of inquiry. Using this data, I intend to show *how* and *what* promotes my learning. The last piece of each section, '*Why does this matter to me,*' is meant to show the impact of this learning and my development. Lastly, I will summarize this chapter and link it to the third cycle of inquiry.

## **5.2 First Theme: The Two Different Groups of Volunteers**

### *5.2.1 A First-Person Overview*

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, I nearly discounted the importance that volunteers can be bifurcated as either parental volunteers or non-parental volunteers. The participants tended to be motivated differently based on which group they belong to. The differences in motivation subtly influenced how these volunteers engage the group and what these volunteers attach to.

If someone asked me directly, I would have cognitively admitted that *everyone isn't like me*. But, as I will show below, my attitude did not necessarily reflect this truth. I assumed other volunteers were more like me than not and have the same motivations. After being 'hit in the face' with the reality that I overly simplified why people volunteered, I gained a new lens to use. This new lens revealed some of my biases and helped me to understand some of the biases of other volunteers. It also helped reinforce my future role as a volunteer within the organization.

### *5.2.2 Data*

As I listened to the parental volunteers talk about their motivations to volunteer, I was initially surprised at how self-serving they sounded. The parental volunteers were quite open that they volunteered primarily for their children. James told me how his youngest son was the "one thing the keeps me around." Despite the rich experiences that Leia described, she said that seeing her kids participate was "when [she] was the happiest." Their perspective also surprised me because I thought that they would *think as I did*. However, I didn't have the parental and non-parental vocabulary at the time. Like myself, James and Leia had volunteered for such a long time. They each had

volunteered many, many years before their kids were old enough to participate. As they spoke, I recall thinking “I thought we were the same. How can you sound so different?”

My first reaction was one of shock. But, as I relistened to the conversation several times, I pictured how Leia’s posture became brighter when she spoke about her kids getting old enough to join the youth. I recalled how James looked tired and how his youngest son, being a senior, was likely the main thread to keep him connected to volunteering. On reflection, I then saw myself. I did not see myself as a parental volunteer within our organization. I saw myself as the parental volunteer for our community’s park and recreation soccer league.

There, I coach my son’s soccer team. I thought Leia, James, and I were similar. We learned that we are similar but not in the way that I thought. In the soccer league, I attempt to be a role model for the other kids on the soccer team. But hearing James’ words of what motivates him, I know that I am motivated to coach only because of my son. I primarily volunteer because of him and only secondarily to be a role model to others.

As I thought about how I framed coaching soccer to other adults who volunteer within our organization, I realized that I misframed it. I often focused on how much fun I was having coaching “all of those kids” and the joy that it brought me. I emphasized the altruist nature of the role and the potential impact of encouraging the other kids and promoting positive self-esteem. However, listening to and reflecting upon the volunteers’ interviews and stories, I learned that I was primarily coaching for my son. Sure, the other kids mattered, but I realized how little they motivated my presence. It paled compared to the motivation that my son brought me.

Maybe, selfishly, I wanted my son to have a particular role model. I wanted him to practice persevering, competing well, and working hard. No matter the score of the game, I wanted my son to practice graciousness for people while also learning to hold high standards of discipline.

Though my motivations were not entirely mutually exclusive, I finally understood that volunteering was heavily dependent on my shared experience with my son. I was shaping his experience. And while I hoped that the values I held were the *right values* for all the other kids at the time, Leia and James helped me realize that I cared much

more about what I thought my son needed than caring about what the other kids needed.

Like Leia explaining her most joyful moment volunteering was her kids beginning to participate, I reflected on some of my most joyful moments as a coaching volunteer. They involved my son, not the group who I volunteered for. One of the first moments that I thought about was how my son and I sat under the lights on the field drinking our water right after soccer practice. We walked to the hill that separates the fields for the younger kids and the older kids. As we drank, the fall weather was just beginning to show itself in the southern United States. I could smell the change in the air. We watched as everyone on the younger fields, our fields, slowly left. I sat there quietly watching him drink his water and eating his banana. I laughed at the thought of how happy getting two bananas in a single day made him. We chatted about how the older kids practiced, but I could tell that he really didn't care. He preferred to finish his snack and then race me up the hill. And so, we 'raced.' These are the moments why I coached.

This reflection helped me reexamine my motivations within the non-profit organization, but the volunteers' stories helped me *relive* memories. I discovered how complex my motivations were. Yes, I was motivated by the organization's mission, but maybe rather than just being motivated by the organizational mission, I was also motivated by the shared experiences with the students. We shared games and trips. And as Weenink and Bridgman (2017) point out as what often occurs with volunteers' motivation, my motivation evolved. I became friends with the other adult volunteers and students, and even though I was mentoring students at some capacity, the potential new shared experiences became much more a forethought than the organization's mission. Now, my motivations seem to be evolving again.

### *5.2.3 Why This Matters to Me*

There are two reasons that examining volunteers through the parental and non-parental volunteer lens is important to me. The first reason is that this lens gives me a broader vocabulary and deeper understanding of how to better engage in conflict between parental and non-parental volunteers. Before this project, I was much less empathetic of some parental volunteers' motivations. Like with my role as the soccer coach, I now see that some volunteers may view their role as an extension of how they parent their children. When conflict between values arises, I incorrectly assumed that

all volunteers prioritized the needs of the students, as a whole, over the needs of one or two students. But, much like how I approached soccer, some parental volunteers are only participating because of their children.

The second reason that this theme is important to me is that it will help inform where I volunteer within the organization. I have volunteered with the students for over ten years now. Rather than continuing to volunteer with the older students, my wife and I started asking ourselves if we want to change departments and began volunteering in the younger children's department. My two children participate in that department. This is a decision that my wife, Stephanie, and I will make together. But, as she and I have already discussed, she is now highly motivated to volunteer where her children are and where she can create shared experiences with them. As she and I talk about what might drive this change, Stephanie told me she no longer felt useful in the student department and that the lack of meaningfulness was part of the problem.

As we talked, she rhetorically asked, "why should I take time away from other things when I could be doing something else?" I wondered what things she was talking about taking away from. *Did she just want to stop volunteering? Like me, was she struggling with the last leadership change?* We have spoken on several occasions about how this last transition has felt more difficult for us both. "I think that I want us to volunteer in children's," she told me. Stephanie's motivations have shifted, and my motivations have changed with her. As I will outline in the next two themes though, for me at least, it is more complicated than just a desire to be a parental volunteer. Though that plays a major role, the following two themes also play a role.

### **5.3 Second Theme: Continuous Cycle of Grief**

#### *5.3.1 A First-Person Overview*

I wrote in the previous chapter that I thought that the parental and non-parental theme could be one of the most important themes because of the implications that it has to our organization. However, there is no doubt that the grief cycle is the most important theme to me personally. As I will show in the data below, as this theme developed, the way that the I approached this project evolved. It shaped this chapter and the following chapters because, ultimately, how it shaped my *attention* (Ramsey, 2014). As a researcher, recognizing my grief promoted deeper reflection that ultimately steered my



incorporating an autoethnographic method of inquiry. As a volunteer, recognizing my grief encouraged me to reexamine my practice as a volunteer and potentially interrupted me from *fading away* as other volunteers have done.

### 5.3.2 Data

By the time that I had spoken to Leia, I had already interviewed two other volunteers. Those volunteers used words that made me believe that they were tired. Yes, I heard words of grief from them. I also heard many more phrases of fatigue, such as “burns you out quickly,” “is it worthwhile,” “removing myself,” “considering not to continue,” “had to pull back,” and “reached my limit,” I recall how tired these volunteers looked as they recalled some of their struggles with some changes and how each of them spoke slowly. It was a gradual progression, but this was the beginning of me seeing the volunteers differently and more genuinely.

As I listened to them speak in a seemingly guarded pace, I questioned whether they were just tired of volunteering or if something else was going on. Addie and Michelle looked as if they could quit volunteering at any moment. And even though James sounded and looked energized the first time that we spoke, his posture, tone, and words echoed Addie’s and Michelle’s by our second conversation. “It’s not fair to do that to your volunteers,” he complained once referencing how he felt the organization treated volunteers.

When I was pre-coding after my initial two interviews, I used the word *fatigue* fifteen times over the first two interviews. I recall that I felt sad for, and yet, still somewhat dismissive of those volunteers. “They have contributed so much over the years to the organization,” I thought. I did not want them to question whether *it was worthwhile* to volunteer. I did not want them to feel the need *to pull back*. As each volunteer spoke, I listened and smiled in polite agreement, but I wanted nothing less than for either of them to stop volunteering. It was somber closing out those interviews.

My following conversation was with Leia. As she began to describe leadership changes in her life, I was predisposed to search for the *fatigue* in her story. But, something happened. Leia began describing how one particular leadership change “was like a funeral.” As she retold about her losses, she still spoke emotionally about it even though the loss had occurred more than two decades before. “It is hard when one leader

leaves,” she says. “It is hard,” I thought. I thought about how it is hard on the volunteers. It is hard on the students. It is hard on me. I thought about how it is not the additional workload that was the most difficult. It was something else.

And so, I sat there, somewhat dumbfounded. Yes, I was hearing *fatigue* as in my earlier interviews, but I was now interpreting the fatigue as a response to loss and grief. As I sat listening to Leia, this new realization helped me to recall my first experience of leadership change. My wife, Stephanie, and I started volunteering because the paid leader at the time, Jamie, asked if we were interested. Over the next couple of years, our family and his family became close friends. Our families had dinner together often weekly. We spent many hours together mentoring the students.

One day, without any notice to Stephanie and me, Jamie called me to tell me that he had been fired. Leia’s comment, “like a funeral,” was a perfect explanation of that moment. I understand her statement. Our friends’ lives had been disrupted. Our relationship had been disrupted and would change after that moment forever. And even though many younger students were not affected by the change, the majority of the older students stopped attending.

I recall Stephanie and I questioned whether we wanted to continue to volunteer. We took on much more responsibility. Though I do not recall how long, maybe for the next several months, she and I discussed our frustrations and our fatigue with one another. We would talk about how much we missed Jamie and his family, how things had changed, and how *tired* we felt.

Listening to the volunteer’s grief, the realization of that former grief came rushing back into my memories. But with that grief, the joy of mentoring the remaining students after Jamie’s departure also came rushing back. I realized from speaking to James that I found the energy to continue through mentoring students and building deeper relationships with them. Like James said about another leadership change event that he struggled with, “he [meaning the departed leader] was one man” but “there were fifty or sixty kids who need us.”

The students and I no longer had Jamie’s house to meet up and “play.” As a result, a group of students would come to Stephanie’s and my house. We played board games together. We had airsoft battles. We built a community. Like Leia explained in her

story, I also “definitely [grew] closer to the kids” after the paid leader left the organization. And even though I grieved the loss of Jamie, I also celebrated how my relationship with the students deepened.

I do not recall when I finished grieving Jamie’s departure. I do remember that by the time the next leader was hired, approximately two years, that I no longer focused much on Jamie’s leadership and more on how my leadership influenced the group. More importantly, when meeting Max, the next hired leader, I remember my anxiousness and my apprehensiveness of new leadership. Even though on the outside, I was supportive, my internal attitude was very different. It could be summed up by my internal dialog with the phrase, “Well, great, someone new to screw up what we’ve all worked so hard to build.”

Max did not “screw up” what the existing leadership had built. Both Max and Hector, the following leader, leveraged the existing volunteering system. My relationships with the students and many other volunteers thrived. Despite what I would consider ideal conditions of change, I realized listening to the volunteers' stories that I still grieved the changes that Max and Hector brought. I grieved the responsibility that was passed off when the leaders arrived. I grieved how my role changed within the organization and in the students' lives. The data was influencing me. It was changing me.

### 5.3.3 *Why This Matters to Me*

I believe that understanding the perpetual grieving cycle is critical to my ability to continue to volunteer within the organization. Without this understanding, I think that I would have used the COVID lock-down as an excuse to completely *fade away* and would have likely never sought to volunteer within the organization in any future capacity.

Previously, before this project, I attempted to avoid any grief that arose from the losses of change. Sure, the organizational executive team, such as Matthew, would encourage us and ask us about our grief, but my responses were usually the similar, “I’m good” or “I’m fine.” My responses lacked much reflection. Because as James believed during our conversations, I thought that *the need of the one outweighs the need of the many*. But reflecting on the most recent leadership changes, I realized how

fatigued I felt at times, how easily frustrated that I could get with specific leadership decisions, and, most importantly, how little that I was aware of the losses over the years that needed grieving.

For example, after a major change, my wife and I both often temporarily struggled to attend events. She and I would rotate the responsibilities that we shared in order to ‘recover from being tired.’ It had usually been for a short period, such as three or four months. She would attend the events that she shared the highest interaction with students and other volunteers, and I would usually attend the other events. Coincidentally, those other events were usually the events that I shared the highest interaction with others. I never paused to consider the reason behind this fatigue and never realized that this ‘tiredness’ was likely my grief. This pattern has always occurred several months after a new paid leader had been hired.

If this break had occurred immediately after the leadership change, I would have understood that I was actually tired from the additional responsibility taken on while our organization searched to hire someone else. However, the pause did not happen immediately but occurred several months after the leader had been hired. Additionally, on reflection, our *pulling back* occurred after the leader made changes that altered our relationships with students and volunteers in some way. The one time that my wife and I did not pull back but continued the same commitment level was only after Max was hired. Also, he has been the only hired leader who did not change the relationship dynamics with the students and volunteers.

Understanding this perpetual grieving cycle has helped me guide the changes with this last change event. When Hector left, the volunteers began to fill new roles that typically occur in such changes. Some moments, the organization would lean heavily on me to help. At other times, I would show up surprised at the direction that the organization had already chosen. Addie and Michelle described this period as *lacking a sense of direction of leadership* or that *they did not really know who was in charge*.

However, I learned that they were also describing a period of internal volunteer conflict that fueled losses and grief. For example, when I recall the moments that they described as “lacking a sense of leadership direction,” I perceive the group as being in a state of drifting but with pockets of leadership divergence and conflict. Addie

described this time as some volunteers continuously creating “division or problems that are never addressed.” A picture of this situation is where some volunteers lack direction, and so they become passive. Other volunteers are attached so strongly to a specific group that they push forward with an agenda, possibly leaving the overall group behind. In this most recent example, I think about how the power struggle between some parental volunteers pushing forward with the focus on their children exacerbated the conflict. Michelle told me that “it broke [her] heart” that some of the students felt left out. Yet, this subset of the overall group pushed forward at the expense of losing volunteers and other students.

I realize that, for me, I now would describe those moments as events that triggered more loss and grief. I believe that part of the loss came from seeing how changes isolated some volunteers and students as I noticed some *fading away*. Reflecting on this made me recall all the past times that volunteers *faded away*. Unlike the previous times though, I was connected to these volunteers who *faded away*. Michelle’s and Addie’s words, as I outlined in the previous chapter, echo in my mind. These losses were different. These losses were important to me. These losses fueled more grief. My understanding the grieving that I was experiencing gives me a frame to view my experiences and a path to acknowledge rather than ignore the dynamics. Frustration and fatigue may still occur, but I now can see the broader complexities of loss that occur during these change events.

#### **5.4 Third Theme: Volunteers Often Lack a Path Toward Redevelopment**

##### *5.4.1 A First-Person Overview*

As I discussed in the previous section, I often answered something like “I’m fine” or “I’m good” when asked how I was coping with leadership change. I moved forward by largely not recognizing grief. However, as I listened to other volunteers, I learned that some seemed to have hit a wall that no longer allowed them to move forward as volunteers. As I outline in the previous chapters, Michelle and Addie were already questioning whether that they could even move forward as volunteers during our interviews. And at this point, they both have stopped volunteering altogether.

After my paradigm shift with Leia, I entered the interviews with Michelle and Addie contemplating *how was I different*. I was wondering what different circumstances

allowed me to ‘plow forward’ in the past? I now see that I was arrogant to think that I was different. I realized that although I am not so different, I experienced slightly different circumstances. Below, I will discuss how redevelopment provided relief to some of my grief and why it matters to me when I realize that I lack a natural redevelopment path.

#### 5.4.2 Data

As I listened to Michelle’s and Addie’s stories in their first interviews, I wondered why I initially struggled to relate to parts of their stories. “Sure,” I thought, “I’ve been frustrated and tired, but I wouldn’t just *quit*.” As I said before, I was somewhat sad for their fatigue. But silently, I was also judging their experiences with James’ words lingering in the back of my mind, *the needs of the many outweigh the need of the one*.

I was frankly thinking to myself, “It can’t be that bad. Just suck it up. You are here not for yourself but the students. Just say that *you’re fine* and move forward.” Thankfully, my posture and inquiry did not seem to reflect my attitude. Despite my internal judgments, I continued to probe, acted interested, and put on a fake show of ‘support’ so as not to disrupt their story. Ultimately, my arrogance would be short-lived.

As I mentioned, Leia’s description of *the funeral* was a critical junction though. I relistened to the first set of interviews multiple times. My attitude began to change from a place of judgment to a place of genuine inquiry. This change helped me to start hearing more than the volunteers’ fatigue. I began to ask myself, *why do I think that I was different in the past and think that I did not feel as fatigued as these participants*, and *where could I possibly relate to their fatigue*. These questions shaped the next interviews.

During the second interview with Addie, she retold part of her experience after Jamie left. She talked about how the volunteers were “involved in the decision making” and how we were “really set up to interact with the kids.” Our entire group was “really setup [. . .] to succeed.”

*She’s right*, I thought. In our first conversation, I shook my head in a disingenuous agreement. But in our second conversation, as I mentioned in the last section, I found myself relating to her story and understanding my own grief. She continued by saying that “Everyone had a major role. Everyone contributed to making things work.” Addie

was talking about being “needed, wanted, and loved.”

I realized that having a “role” to “contribute” where I was being “needed, wanted, and loved” was an important path for me to move forward after Jamie’s departure. Yes, I realized that I was fatigued after Jamie left. But, *redevelopment* played a critical role that helped me move forward. It was not planned redevelopment, but it was redevelopment, nonetheless. I thought about all the ways that I was able to contribute, such as opening our house up to the students as a place to gather and leading new groups. I was not “just tired” as Michelle framed how she felt. When she spoke, I could see the fatigue in her posture. It was almost as she wanted to say at any moment, “I just want to stop showing up.” Oddly, I was *tired*, but I was also *energized* because I could contribute. On the other hand, Michelle lacked a path to energize herself, and as I show in the next chapter, she lacked the people around her to be aware of her predicament.

#### 5.4.3 *Why This Matters to Me*

Redevelopment personally matters to me because for the first time, as a volunteer, I have found myself attempting to navigate a leadership change event without a *redevelopment path*. I define a redevelopment path as a preexisting structure that promotes volunteers to assimilate and that such assimilation encourages volunteers to feel, as James describes, “wanted, needed, and loved.”

The potential cause of this lack of redevelopment path is likely a COVID lock-down coinciding with adjusting to new leadership. Essentially, our group was in the process of adapting to the newly hired leader before our organization entered an extended COVID lock-down. However, as Addie and Michelle discussed for themselves, my role was not yet concretely defined either. Volunteers then *lost* over an entire year with their students.

Because my wife and I mentored many of the Junior and Senior high school students, by the time our organization attempted to resume activities after the lock-down, our students had aged out or were about to age out of the group. Our high school ‘Seniors’ were about to complete their freshman year of college, and our high school ‘Juniors’ had become high school Seniors and were about to graduate. Historically, as some students age out, I had already begun to build a relationship with other students. Now, a natural path did not exist for me to organically “pick up” building new

relationships with the next group.

About a month after writing this section, I chaperoned a student mission trip. It was a curious position that I found myself in, and it gave me a new perspective. The trip was one of the first major events that I had participated in since the COVID-19 lockdown. In the previous chapter, I presented Addie's and Michelle's description of not feeling needed. And as in Addie and Michelle stories, I found that I did not feel needed on this particular trip.

In many regards, I can point to several critical roles that I played. Firstly, we lacked drivers that were approved under the organization's insurance to drive the organization's passenger vehicles. It was not a glamorous role but a critical role, nonetheless. Secondly, I was the most tenured volunteer on the trip and was able to contribute logistically to routine minor problems when such arose. However, I lacked relationships with most of the students in this group. I realized that my desire was more than the belief that I was needed. I desired that I was needed in a specific way, *as a mentor*. When I consider how I would redevelop for the student's department versus how I would develop for the children's department, the former seems exhausting while the latter seems to energize me. I had always envisioned volunteering for the students and, like Leia's words, experiencing the joy that my kids can participate in something that I have invested so much time in over the years.

Now, because of the culmination of each of these factors discussed in the project (parental volunteering, motivation, impact of grief, and redevelopment), I am now certain that I want to volunteer elsewhere. The data has changed and continues to change me. I want to volunteer in the children's department. There, I have a *natural redevelopment path*. Grief and motivations are different. There, I will be a parental volunteer.

## **5.5 Chapter Summary and Linking to the Third Cycle of Inquiry**

At the beginning of this thesis, I was excited about this project because I was personally connected to the organization. However, I never expected for it to become so personal. I never imagined that my volunteering practice and how I view volunteering would change so much. I expected to uncover tools and techniques to help the volunteers and myself to better manage the non-profit. I expected to discover



processes, but I found stories full of emotions. As I plan to show more in the next chapter, what I found was people. I also discovered that I was right there alongside my fellow volunteers.

Some of the data in the current and previous chapter, I believe, shows that I was initially like Peter Pan's shadow. Physically, I was sitting in the room with other volunteers, listening to the re-living and telling of their stories. I was a researcher. But as I sat there, like Peter's shadow, my shadow was detached, lingering in the background. Eavesdropping even. As the volunteers spoke, it seemed that my shadow was reflecting on the stories that it heard. Sometimes it heard warmth. Other times, it may have heard something cold. It started to relive some of its experiences which caused my shadow to step in closer. It listened deeper. With each story, it continued to move forward until, by the middle of these interviews, my shadow was no longer hiding in the background. It was there alongside me, attempting to remain connected to me. Even when it was difficult to stay, as I will speak about in the next chapter regarding my conversation with Matthew, my shadow endured. To borrow from Ramsey, I was in the midst of centering "attention rather than knowledge" (2014, p. 18).

In many regards, this chapter first seemed like the mountaintop of my research thesis journey. It described how my understanding of motivation altered how I want to volunteer in the future. I want to be a parental volunteer. It discusses my revelation of my grief. It is not just other volunteers who hurt. I also hurt. The chapter also outlines redevelopment and highlights how I began to understand what some other volunteers experience. Lost. Wasted. Failed. But also, a path forward. Yet, this is not the mountaintop. In the next chapter, I will discuss these themes again from more of an integrated perspective. There, I will show the results as I *tested the plausibility* (Ramsey, 2014) of these themes. And ultimately, within the third cycle of inquiry, I reach the thesis' apex.

## Chapter 6 - Testing the Plausibility

### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to *test the plausibility* and the potential impact of the three research themes (Parental and Non-Parental Volunteers, the Volunteering Grief Cycle, and Redevelopment) that were brought forth in the previous two chapters. In chapter four, the themes and the implications of those themes were focused on the organizational level. In chapter five, the tone shifted. I narrowed my focus on how the themes impacted me and my practice. I believe that this narrowing is critical to my volunteering practice. However, because I took such an action-based perspective when I discussed *Why Each Theme Mattered to Me* in the previous chapter, I will primarily test the themes in this current chapter at the organizational level. Additionally, the primary purpose of my conversations with current and former organizational employees was to obtain feedback at the organizational level and the effect that these themes could have on the organization. Though, the interlocking nature of *first-person* and *second-person* research limited a pure bifurcation of the two perspectives (i.e., organizational or personal practice).

The outline of this chapter consists of first discussing an overview of the action component within this project. I then discuss how I framed the themes in my two conversations as I *tested the plausibility*. Shown below, the framing of these themes evolved from my first conversation (with Matthew) to my second conversation (with Hector). Next, I write about my discussion with and the feedback from an executive within my organization, Matthew. This section will be, somewhat, disorderly because the direction that this conversation took surprised me. I believe that Matthew and I can usually communicate really well with one another. However, in this particular conversation, I show how we struggled to communicate and show the learning that came out of that struggle. Our conversation stressed where and how the thesis' focus had ultimately shifted.

As a result of this experience, I concluded that I needed to have a second conversation. But rather than following up with Matthew again or meeting with another organizational executive, I chose to meet with a former manager of the student

department. This decision is discussed below in the *Did I Have to Go Outside of Our Organization* section. I then write about my discussion with and the feedback from the former manager.

Afterwards, I outline how *testing the plausibility* influenced the project's recommendation of translating these themes into action. Because the *first-person research* cycle continued into this third cycle of inquiry, I had to choose whether to present that data and discussion in the previous chapter or interweave it into this chapter. You will find below that I chose the latter (1) so the reader would have a better continuity of the timeline, (2) and so the evidence that promoted further *first-person inquiry* would be clearer. In many regards, this chapter is the summit of the thesis. I had initially considered the *first-person* chapter as the mountaintop. However, I later realized that I was standing at the foot of the summit looking down and admiring how far I had climbed. I was forgetting to look upwards and onward. And so lastly, I will summarize this chapter. Included in this summary is a discussion regarding *how* my attention was redirected and the impact that turning towards and scaling that summit ultimately had on this thesis project.

## **6.2 The Project's Action Component**

One actionable component within this project is *testing the plausibility* of these research themes. To accomplish this, I spoke with an executive within my organization and later spoke with a former manager of our organization. The aim was to *sell* actionable responses to these themes (Ramsey, 2014). I will show below how those involved responded to these proposed actions.

However, like the previous phases of this project, this phase was also emergent. I initially spoke with Matthew, one of the organization's executives, to discuss and *sell* my findings. My initial plan within the research design was to only speak with the organizational executives. However, after Matthew's and my initial conversation, I realized that *something was missing*. Frankly, I did not know at the time what was missing. Upon reflecting on how our conversation emerged, I now believe that Matthew and I could not move too far beyond the academic discussion of these themes and struggled to move into discussing the actionable components.

As a result of this first conversation, I also wanted to gain Hector's feedback

regarding these research themes. Hector, as I spoke of in the previous chapters, is one of the former paid student leaders (i.e., former manager). I believe that Hector has the unique perspective of not only understanding the dynamics of our organization but also the experience of potentially seeing some of these themes develop in his new organization. Our conversation highlighted both opportunities and pitfalls within these themes. As I will show below, I believe that Hector provided a valuable bridge between the more theoretical conversation that I had with Matthew and the actionable objectives that the organization or volunteers could implement. However, you will not find an action plan or change initiative below. Yes, as I will discuss, I have ideas that were generated about what the organization should pay attention to in the future. However, my entire relationship with theory changed because of this thesis project. By the time that I spoke with Matthew and Hector, the research questions were not the primary focus but were a part of the larger inquiry process. The thesis has become something deeper, richer, that I could not even put into words before these conversations.

As a result of my relational change with theory, rather than approaching these individuals from the position of, *here are the answers to these problems*, I started by framing the conversations as *this is what I have been learning*. This approach promoted significant sense-making and negotiating that led to even a deeper understanding of these themes. For example, as I will show when discussing re-development with Hector, this approach likely allowed for a shared definition between us.

### **6.3 How I Framed the Discussion with Colleagues**

Within this thesis and with the others with whom I spoke, I followed a similar pattern framing these themes. I outlined the (1) parental and non-parental effect, then discussed the potential (2) influence of grief and concluded with emphasizing the (3) importance of redevelopment to these themes. Because I lacked the event to underscore how the thesis had been shifting, I also explained the research thesis' background and how I was asking *how do volunteers operate a non-profit without a paid leader*.

Although, as I spoke with Matthew and Hector, I realized that this question assumes that our organization maintains sufficient volunteers to actually operate the non-profit. Matthew's emphasis (expanded on below) on *the right volunteers* stood out to me because I have not experienced our organization actually filtering for *the right*

volunteers. Like Addie talked about, my experience is that we often just need people willing to volunteer. As a result, any potential problems, such as a conflict between volunteers, regularly are ignored because we lack sufficient volunteers to *fill in*.

I realized that one assumed and unstated sub-question in this project was to ask *how do we retain volunteers in order to have sufficient volunteers to actually operate*. And from my experience, our department having sufficient volunteers to operate the non-profit is cyclical. There are periods that we have sufficient volunteers for the student department, and there are periods that we struggle to find volunteers to even chaperone events, much less mentor students. For example, during the time following Jamie's departure, the student department was extremely short on volunteers. At the time of my wrapping up this project, the department is currently experiencing a similar phenomenon of volunteer shortage.

My conversation with Hector really brought this previously unstated sub-question to the forefront. As he talked about the positives and negatives of parental and non-parental volunteers, I realized that he struggled to find conflict management tools because of the difficulty of finding volunteers. As I will expand on later, he believed that parental volunteers would follow him to the "end of the earth," but they were only with him "for a season." Non-parental volunteers provided significant "stability," but they also can be resistant to change.

One proposed action within this project was to use the parental / non-parental theme to engage volunteers differently so that we could connect to what volunteers are committed, how they are engaged, and to what they are attached. This action could support some parental volunteers to become non-parental volunteers after their children age out. It also means that we focus on balancing the parental / non-parental volunteer mix. As I explained to Hector, *balance* does not mean to equal. The organization's volunteer mix will need to be different based on any sort of circumstances, such as, but certainly not limited to (1) the current number of students, (2) the current offered activities, (3) whether a paid leader exists. *Balance* means, to me, having an appropriate mix that minimizes departmental vacillation because we are focusing on a mix of volunteers with different commitment levels, engagement levels, and attachments. Using the lens of the *perpetual grieving cycle* and how parental / non-parental

volunteers are motivated, are engaged, and will attach, can be tools to help balance such a volunteering mix.

The next proposed action is incorporating redevelopment. However, as I will show below in *Translating Themes into Action*, the feedback from Matthew and Hector led me to conclude that redevelopment ought to be the primary action and the focus of our organization. As a result, the previously proposed action of balancing the parental / non-parental volunteer mix becomes a result of redevelopment rather than an action to implement. The Discussion and Feedback sections below are intent to support this transition to emphasizing redevelopment.

#### **6.4 Discussion with and Feedback from an Organizational Executive**

In many regards, I considered Matthew an important executive to discuss the research themes with. It was his story that painted word pictures of how volunteers leading an organization could look different than how the volunteers lead within our organization. In his story, rather than Matthew *taking over* how the student segment operated when he was a paid student leader a couple of decades before, he was the person that supported the volunteers to continue to run the non-profit's student segment. Additionally, Matthew is also a major change agent within the organization who leads and supports the implementation of such concepts that are found within this thesis. As a result, I initially considered his response to these themes vital to achieving organizational action. However, as I will show below, the discussion and feedback were different than I expected.

##### *6.4.1 Struggling to Communicate the Themes*

Matthew and I struggled to *speak the same language*. This created several starts and stops when we talked about the two actions related to the parental / non-parental theme and the redevelopment theme.

I began our conversation emphasizing the way I learned how the parental volunteers “spoke about volunteering through their kids” and how I learned that we could provide volunteer stability by understanding, balancing, and leveraging parental and non-parental volunteers. My position was that this action could affect volunteers’ consistency, motivation, organizational commitment, and the vacillation that volunteers may experience when attempting to run the non-profit.

However, Matthew seemed to hear this theme as oppositional to a pastoral position. He seemed to interpret my intentions that *we should focus on the organizational management side at the expense of his pastoral role*. As I asked Matthew's thoughts on this theme, he responded that "coming from a different pastoral lens, if someone is committed to the organization but they don't love Jesus, then it doesn't matter to [him]." He continued, "so, if we are a church and someone is not [a follower of Jesus], but [they] really wanted to be in student ministry [volunteering], I couldn't allow that. I don't see it as our mission to put bodies into an organized fashion. So, do we need committed people, yes. But, not at the sake of missing Jesus."

I never considered these positions (organizational management and pastoral care) within this research as oppositional but rather see these positions as complementary to one another. This conflict became an important influencer on how I would interpret the data and what I was paying attention to. As I highlight later on, emotive data existed within me, and it supported my search deeper. But to move forward in conversation with Matthew, I used a well-known family, the Black family, to clarify my position and to help provide a common language for us to speak. Even though Matthew and I moved closer to understanding one another, a gulf remained.

As we moved to the next theme, we also struggled to *speak the same language* regarding redevelopment. As I explained how redevelopment could look in action at our organization, Matthew equated redevelopment to training. He retold me the story about his first couple of years working at our organization. When he arrived, he had been assigned to strengthen a particular program. So, he began training. He told me that "people voted with their feet." He paused and then said, "because training equaled change."

Matthew continued, "So, I was tasked with adult [volunteers]. My first few meetings were just learning how they functioned. I was asking probing questions, and people were getting uncomfortable. They thought that *once I knew that [they would] have to change things*. People just stopped coming to training. The leaders told me that training equals change."

He told me how he stopped interacting with those volunteers. "I still don't give energy to [that program] anymore. So, I think of it from that end, come in and do

development, but people voted with their feet. What you are talking about may be different, but the organization chose to not redevelop.” His experience seemed to jade his reaction to the theme of redevelopment, of reshaping one’s role, and of adapting one’s role to changes that had occurred. However, as I will highlight in the next section, we did eventually find a common language. Though, we still struggled to practically discuss how these themes ultimately looked in action at our organization.

#### *6.4.2 Started Speaking the Same Language about the Parental / Non-Parental Theme?*

To convey how I thought leveraging the parental and non-parental volunteering theme was not competing with Matthew’s pastoral lens but complemented it, I brought up the Black family (also volunteers) as an illustration to help create a shared language. This family had consistently volunteered in a single role within the organization for approximately a decade. But, when their children got older and moved into the children’s department, the Black family wanted to transition. They requested to follow their children. I explained how I thought leveraging this theme does not necessarily equate to a lack of consideration or concern for volunteers. Rather, considering the parental and non-parental volunteering theme, our organization could better anticipate how volunteers may desire to transition throughout different departments. Yes, I see that the evidence points to this as an organizational management issue. Although it was not completely apparent to me at that moment, I also saw it as something much more. It was about the people. In Matthew’s words, he would have likely called it pastoral. In my words, it was about slowing down so that we can see people clearer, fuller, so we are better able to care for them.

Discussing the Black family then reminded Matthew of other families that could be viewed through the parental and non-parental volunteering lens. He told me about Erin’s family and how they are also “moving with children.” He believes that Erin’s family will continue to move with their children, “even into students . . . because they are so committed [to their children].” “If parents aren’t committed to their children, then who will be? So, at some level, I think that is a healthy thing.” In and of itself, I agree with Matthew.

However, if our organization can leverage the parental and non-parental lens for



volunteers, I believe that we would better support those volunteers, not manipulate volunteers, but actually care for them. As I earlier foreshadowed the summit moment, this part of the conversation was getting me near the point. People in the organization are managing. The research question had been asking *how do volunteers manage a non-profit*. But like James retold in one of our conversations, I started to learn in this thesis how much people needed to be cared for, even me. The desire for being *wanted, needed, and loved*. The identity of parental and non-parental volunteers is likely to just be one lens to accomplish this goal. But, it is the identity discovered in this thesis.

#### 6.4.3 *The Grieving Theme - Are We, as an Organization, Really Doing Enough?*

As we continued to talk about volunteers, we transitioned into discussing their grief. This was one theme that Matthew and I were able to quickly *speak the same language*. As I explained my perspective about the perpetual grieving cycle, Matthew retold his experience with how volunteers, students, and parents grieved Hector's departure. Matthew told me that "especially behind the scenes, we were having those conversations [about grief] with folk." Matthew confirmed his belief of parental grieving and spoke about several individuals with whom they had these discussions. "And families like the Skitters, of course, they had to grieve again because [their son just] went off to college." Matthew added, "I will say that grief is a real thing."

One obstacle that we ran into though was that as I talked about grief, I also sought some action to curtail it, such as focusing on redevelopment and helping volunteers to attach to a group, so a sense of loss is diminished when changes occur. Rather, Matthew refocused on how the organization attempted to be open to hearing people's grief in those moments. As he said, "the good news is that on the back end is that these conversations were happening. But, it just gave them a safe place to be mad."

So, I picture myself, politely listening to Matthew but screaming on the inside. I learned in writing about this experience with Matthew that he and I had dramatically different perspectives of what goes on in the student department. I recall the *safe place* that the executive team attempted to provide for the volunteers' grief. However, I hear Jamie's story about how he felt taken advantage of or Michelle's and Addie's story about feeling unheard. I recall my own experiences of ignoring my grief to the point that I easily became frustrated with the organization. Though a safe place is critical, I

was attempting to convey something more actionable. A safe place for volunteers to grieve was a first step. But I was experiencing that our organization was treating it as the last step in caring for volunteers.

In the end, like the parental / non-parental volunteering theme, I would describe the response as *'this is just how things are.'* But with the grieving theme, the tone seemed to indicate that the organization is doing well at helping volunteers grieve. Unfortunately, the actions of volunteers, such as James, Michelle, and Addie, seem to argue otherwise. Later in the chapter, I will come back to this when I discuss the importance of redevelopment in the translating to action section.

#### *6.4.4 Redevelopment Theme*

Rather than focusing on my definition of words, I sought to create some sort of shared language with Matthew to discuss redevelopment. I began by asking whether he believed there was a difference between volunteers in the student department compared to the resistant volunteers he initially encountered after immediately joining our organization. For example, I explained that when the students' paid leader changes, many subsystems change. However, in the adult program that he worked with, there is not that vacillation. When a paid leader [like in Mathew's position] departs or arrives, the change rarely has any impact on their adult program.

I continued, "When you attempted to introduce change, I wonder if you surveyed the individuals in the adult program? My guess is that they believed nothing was missing." Matthew said, "nothing was missing"

**Me:** "So it [the adult program] is very autonomous?"

**Matthew:** Quickly replying, "It runs itself."

**Me:** "But the student [department is] more dependent." Each time a paid student leader arrives, he has a plan of how he wants to operate the department. There is always change. And when he departs, there is always change. Often, roles must adapt, must be redefined, and renegotiated.

**Matthew:** "Yeah, I think that's the difference. There isn't as much redevelopment in an independent area. I think of some organizations who hire [new executive leaders], they only want them to come in for [a specific role]. *Don't touch anything [leader]. We*

*are good.”*

Next, I attempted to connect redevelopment with loss.

**Me:** “So, there is no redevelopment there [because loss didn’t occur.] So, what you are describing is what was built when you worked for an organization as their student leader. The volunteers built an independent system. [The paid leader] was coming in to provide some guidance.”

**Matthew:** “Yeah, I came in to help the system. But, don’t change the system [they told me]. I leaned into [meaning he invested in] the [volunteers].”

Unfortunately, Matthew and I could never materially move beyond a better shared understanding of redevelopment. It seemed that we were bifurcating using management tools / techniques and caring for people as those each were distinct boxes that are practiced. As I will expand upon later in this chapter, this was the summit. *Why do we have to divide theology and management methods, techniques, and process? Why are we talking about how we care for people instead of what makes it difficult to continue to volunteer?*

Writing those words was like a punch in the gut to me. Our organization, including myself, has often used the mantra that *our identity is in Christ*, or ought to be in Christ. We often talk about a single identity. When people in the organization become overly attached to something, we talk in a derogatory tone that his or her identity is elsewhere and not in Christ. Although a theological evaluation is well beyond the scope of this thesis, for me, it is occurring. I have multiple identities. I am a husband, a father, a volunteer, a leader, and a follower. *My identity is in Christ*, but I am not Christ. And if we attempt to distill the complexities of who we are down into ‘volunteers,’ I found within this thesis that I was missing the person. I, myself, was being overlooked. The knowledge generated in this conversation led to the summit moment. It just took more dialog, time, and sense-making for me to grasp it. Next, I will discuss some of that dialog when I went outside of the organization to continue to *test the plausibility*.

## **6.5 Did I Have to Go Outside of Our Organization?**

As I have shown above, Hector’s perspective was critical in shaping how these research themes were tested. Since the focus of this research thesis is organizational

bound, one question that may be asked is *whether I should have gone outside of the organization for testing*.

I believe that I could not have gotten the same *testing* quality within the organization. My belief, if true, may critically influence how the organization will utilize the knowledge created in this project. For example, when I started data collection, our organization had just hired a new paid leader. However, within less than a year in his position, this newly hired leader began to transition into a different role within the organization. The organization moved Todd into the paid leader role. Todd, a very competent individual, in my opinion, was interning with the organization straight out of college. As a result, though as competent as I believe he is, his experience and institutional knowledge in the current role are limited.

After much reflection on my conversation with Matthew, I realized that one thing that seemed to *be missing* was the in-depth institutional knowledge of the student department from any of the executives and current managers. Matthew seemed to focus primarily on relationships with the volunteers, parents, and students. This may have contributed to why Matthew's and my conversation remained at a broader strategic level.

Hector, on the other hand, had intimate institutional knowledge of our organization as well as nearly ten years of experience in such student management roles. As I hoped to have shown in our dialog, he and I were able to test these themes through our shared experiences within the organization. But, he was also able to scrutinize pieces of the themes from a manager's perspective (compared to a volunteer's perspective) and was also able to critically examine the themes through his lens from managing multiple organizations.

## **6.6 Discussion with and Feedback from a Former Manager**

My discussion with Hector was quite different from my discussion with Matthew. I am not certain of the reasons for this difference, but a few possibilities include, but are not limited to: (1) Hector continues to work as a manager in student leadership so this topic could be more relevant, (2) I was able to frame my conversation with Hector more precisely after my experience with Matthew, (3) Because of Matthew's executive role, I may have underestimated his lack of intimate details in the student department.

Additionally, Hector now works for a significantly larger organization [multi-campus] but is still in a similar capacity when he worked as the paid student leader within my organization. His organization currently has three full-time paid leaders specific for their student department which is less than before COVID-19 staffing cuts. Unlike in our organization where the paid leader focuses primarily on the students, those three paid leaders' primary responsibility is to support the volunteers' relationships with students. This shift in the managers' focus results in those paid leaders having much fewer direct relationships with students. Their model is similar to Matthew's work when he was a student leader two decades previously. As I have discussed previously in the introduction chapter, in our organization, the primary relationship vacillates between the paid leader (when one is present and if the students *connect* with the paid leader) and the volunteers (depending on where in the turnover cycle the organization is presently at).

The discussion and feedback below will interweave those perspectives. I will begin by outlining Hector's perspective of one theme and a portion of our dialog that I considered the most impactful feedback to that theme. I will then reflect on his position and discuss how it has influenced my position, if any. Then, I will move into discussing the second theme (and lastly, the third theme) following similar steps.

#### *6.6.1 Hector's Perspective on the Parental / Non-Parental Theme*

As I began describing the parental and non-parental volunteer theme, Hector immediately began reflecting on his experiences working in his current and previous organization. "Thinking back to all of the volunteers, I am trying to think about those who played different roles," he said. I listened as he compared and contrasted volunteers and began sense-making the parental and non-parental volunteer theme.

Hector told me that parental volunteers "are great for a season because it benefits them directly and benefits their family directly. Even if they are not mentoring their kids, they are mentoring kids who are peers to their kids. They are helping their kid have a better experience by just being there and being part of the overall group."

"I like what you said," he told me. "You probably don't keep them [parental volunteers] long term. But while they are there, they are more committed because I think the ownership of what they are doing matters probably more than anything else

that they do. Maybe not their nine to five job putting food on the table, but this is probably right next to it.”

Hector believes that most parental volunteers internally say, “I want my kids to have been in a good student program. So, I am going to be involved, so it [the group] will function the way that it is supposed to. So, the kids that I lead and my kids, specifically, can have a great experience.”

“But they don’t stick around. Their kid graduates, goes to college, and they [the parental volunteers] move on. They are on to the next thing in life. Their commitment is intense for while that I have them, but you don’t keep them long-term. Typically,” he ended.

Hector then retold how he saw non-parental volunteers. “Now, your non-parental volunteers are committed to the student program. Some of my best volunteers who have been around the longest don’t have kids in the program. The faces [paid staff and students] are a revolving door, but they [non-parental volunteers] are going to be here.”

“The only negative that I have seen with that group [non-parental volunteers] is a sense of entitlement that you have to begin to battle there. Stepping into this role, I will have been here four years this January. I have volunteers who have been here for ten [years]. I am just the next face who is in charge.” He told me how some of those non-parental volunteers are not as interested in his ideas and resist change. He believed that they may have been disenchanted with the revolving door of paid leaders. He told me how some non-parental volunteers will respond to him with an attitude of “these are your ideas, but in a couple of years, you will be gone and someone else will bring in new ideas, so this won’t stick.” As a result, Hector told me how he struggled with non-parental volunteers following his leadership. “So, there is a level of commitment to the student’s but maybe not to the [paid] leadership,” he said.

Hector continued, “In some ways, it is good because they become a sounding board, a litmus test. Is this a good idea? Have we tried this in the past? So, they’re [these resist volunteers] helpful there. But it can also be detrimental, you know. It’s like, just because you have been around forever, you haven’t tried this with me leading it. I also need you to buy into the leadership team. I am not sure if this has been highlighted, but it is something that I’ve seen more with the non-parental volunteers because they are the

ones who tend to stick around and are more committed. But they also, over time, can grow in a sense of entitlement.”

Hector continued, “It can be a point of tension at times too. Whereas, if you go more to the parental volunteers, they don’t have [as much history in the student department and buy-in much quicker to new ideas]. It is somewhat easier to lead them at times because they are intensely here for a season, and you know that they aren’t going to stick around for the long haul. But, they will follow you to the ends of the earth while you are here [meaning, at the organization]. . . . This is a really good differentiation that you are making here. I obviously think about volunteers who are here for a season versus those who stick around for the long haul. But, how being a parent of people there . . . . I mean, I thought about it but not how it impacts the kind of volunteer they are.”

#### *6.6.2 Reflecting on the Discussions and Feedback: Parental and Non-Parental Theme*

Hector agreed that balancing and leveraging the parental and non-parental volunteering mix is important. He considered the strengths that each can provide and highlighted a pitfall of non-parental volunteers, as well as a pitfall and struggle with non-parental volunteers that he seemed to be currently in the midst of experiencing. When I spoke with Matthew previously, as I showed above, I argued and believed that non-parental volunteers in the student department did not have the same resistance to change that some other organizational volunteers possess outside of the student department. Matthew and Hector both confirmed that their experience was similar to my experience with non-parental volunteers within our organization. However, after speaking with Hector, I now can see how this lack of resistance is constructed and dependent on the current organizational structure. If our organization transitioned to a system that lowers vacillation, some non-parental volunteers could become an obstacle to future change agents.

Also, to Hector, parental volunteers can provide energy and a quick buy-in. However, that energy can leave quickly when their kids leave, either by graduating or just by ceasing to participate in the group. He continued that non-parental volunteers can provide consistency and stability even if they may also be resistant to change.

A sense of entitlement from non-parental volunteers did not appear in my data. One potential reason is that, as Hector stated, the student department in our organization is

structured differently. However, as I discussed with both Hector and Matthew, some volunteers in other organizational departments do have that sense of entitlement and resist change. As a result, another potential reason this did not appear in the data is that I am a non-parental volunteer myself. Though based on our relationship and history with one another, I believe that Matthew would be frank and candid with me, although Hector and other volunteers who interviewed with me could have likely withheld such candid remarks regarding non-parental volunteers while in my presence.

### 6.6.3 Hector's Perspective on the Grieving Theme

As I explained the theme of the *perpetual grieving cycle* to Hector, he said, "I recall coming on board within the organization [this project's organization] and the season of grieving. [It was] because of the long periods of time and turnover. . . . Not having anybody [meaning a paid leader] and that kind of stuff. I remember specifically the group of guys that were so close with you. And, I was there for longer than what most people stay at that place. I don't know what it was like after I left, but I can see some volunteers who were still there struggling with that. I can see where some volunteers will say, *well I've got to have the next [Hector] to come in to draw the [the students] into me*. So from your perspective, yeah, I can see that pattern."

Hector continued, "And just from my experience, depending on how the organization is structured, here we have the same problem. So, one of the things that they try to do to remedy that [grieving cycle] is small group leaders [volunteers] stay with a group through graduation. So, if my role [meaning Hector's role] turns over in those four years, that small group sticks together. They just have a different guy speaking on stage. It changes for them, but they have those relationships that keep it consistent. A through-line through that *grief cycle*, if that makes sense."

"I think that is because there is that *grief cycle*, and we can't affect people leaving around one to three years. So, how do we combat that? I don't think that [the small groups] is a fix to things but [rather] a response to the grief cycle. Does that make sense? It's like, *hey we've noticed that there is this grief cycle that occurs when a leader leaves. A grieving for a period of time, you know. There is a bonding. We are surviving together. Then the new guy comes in. There is a grieving and a bonding that happens. There is a period of steadiness, bonding to new ideas, and new energy. They leave, and*



*you start the whole process all over.* I think I definitely see that, for sure. It is just what organizations, volunteers, or whoever does to respond to that I think determines how quickly those things compare and contrast, move, or how slowly those things move or how people get through it.”

Hector continued to compare his experience in his current organization and his experience while at my organization. “In our organization now, we say that we are going to fill that void by making you committed to a specific group of students. So, the grief cycle, for sure. Across the board. From [your organization to] the dozens of organizations and friends that I have in these churches. I’ve seen that time and time again.”

“I think the [question] is what volunteers and organizations can do in response to that cycle. So, at [your organization], it takes longer to hire because they are attempting to find the right person. Here, we have someone in within one month, but we have volunteers to keep the same group of people.”

Clarifying, I responded, “I would say that you are flattening the vacillation, is that correct? The downside though is that it seems that the incoming leader is somewhat constrained in their ability to change the system. In your system, the volunteers are set up in a manner to provide stability, but it seems to come at a cost to the incoming paid leaders. “

Hector agreed. He added that “it is definitely a longer on-ramp of buying trust and buying people’s willingness [to follow]. . . . It flattens the vacillation but increases the on-ramping of volunteers’ willingness to follow the leader who was brought in to do what he was brought in to do. It is a give and take.”

#### *6.6.4 Reflecting on the Discussion and Feedback: Grieving Theme*

This *give and take* that Hector alluded to seems to be one of the balances. As I previously highlighted, Hector’s system is similar to the system that Matthew helped create two decades before. From Hector’s experience, he still believes that grieving occurs when paid leaders depart but that the structure depresses vacillation. As a volunteer, reducing vacillation is appealing to me. Though, as we discussed in the previous section, Hector has experienced such structure as an impediment to being a change agent in his current environment. Listening to Hector, I felt a sense of

compassion and sadness for the resistance that he has experienced in his current organization. I sensed energy in his voice and tone when he spoke about how quickly he experienced buy-in from people within our organization. At that moment, I recall part of me feeling a sense of pride with how many in our organization responded to Hector.

However, now that I am writing, my sense of pride has faded. I am now asking, *is the degree of grieving worth the quick buy-in?* To the paid leaders, such as Hector, who no longer are part of the system, I can see how quick buy-in is critical. To the volunteers who remain, I can see how *protecting* themselves from grief becomes a priority. As an action, I had somewhat abandoned the idea to promote a structure such as Hector's. As I will discuss in the next section, redevelopment seems to be a key suggested response to the grieving cycle.

After reflecting on and writing about my conversation with Matthew and Hector, I also now believe that the choice between a system that focuses on volunteers as the primary mentors or a system that focuses on the paid leader as the primary mentor is not an *either-or* decision. The choice could be a *both-and* decision. Because I cannot expand the scope of this project anymore, I will only mention that a shift toward a consistent volunteer led system could be beneficial to the volunteers and students. This shift likely should not be to the extremes of Hector's organization. As he said, "it is a give and take." Like my conversation with Matthew, this dialogue also benefited from further *first-person inquiry* on my way to the thesis' summit. An *either-or* decision promoted an imagery of whether to keep the paid leader "alive" or the volunteers "alive." I ask myself: *do we really have to choose between who to keep alive?* Since this project has become as much about me as it has about the organization, my biases, my faith does not concede that we must choose between the two. But because the system and those in the system are much more complex than I previously understood them to be, the means by which we have cared for people have been inadequate. Additionally, implementing only a portion of the structure that Hector's organization has could be greatly supplemented by true redevelopment, genuine attentiveness, something that, as I will show next, seems to be overlooked not only within our organization but also within Hector's organization. But when people are attentive of others, as Hector talks about next, *rebirth* occurs.

### 6.6.5 Hector's Perspective on the Redevelopment Theme

After Hector and I discussed how his organizational structure was meant to be a support system for what I call the *perpetual grieving cycle*, I suggested how redevelopment could also aid to support those grieving. Whether this is parental volunteers losing children to graduation or non-parental volunteers losing their *core group*, redeveloping volunteers could support those through the grief.

Since the conversation with Matthew, I believe I was better prepared for the pitfalls of Hector's seeing training and redevelopment as being the same thing. As a result, I prepared to contrast the two from the onset of the conversation. I framed redevelopment not as *training for one's current role or a new role* but as *finding a new place after a role has been lost*. So, redeveloping is not attempting to improve how a role is performed but to replace part of their role, maybe even part of their identity that was lost. It is a process of individuals attempting to individualize their roles, as well as a negotiating process where volunteers shape, mold, and redefine their roles into becoming something new (Kramer and Danielson, 2016).

I explained how I believed that we have some volunteers who *fade away* not because they necessarily want to stop volunteering but because they sense something is lacking. I added Jamie's perspective that volunteers may not feel needed, wanted, and loved. "I definitely understand the idea of redevelopment. I lost something but need to find something new, you didn't use this word, but like purpose. And the response of the two different [volunteering] groups, [i.e., parental and non-parental], I 100 percent see that." Hector and I settled on a shared language of "finding a new purpose" for volunteers.

As Hector and I spoke, I began to question whether redevelopment is something many student departments in a similar religious non-profit organization have the bandwidth to focus on. Paid staff turnover for these positions is consistently high (Fields, 2009). This may, or may not, be a factor in the potential lack of re-development. Either way, Matthew and Hector each struggled with the concept in action. Hector told me, "You are spot on. There is not a lot of great redevelopment stuff."

However, he did recall two examples where he was part of a volunteer "finding a new purpose." The first example was more of recruiting a volunteer back to volunteering with the students. Hector said that he was able to accomplish this because

James “was frustrated with how he was being used. He came back to students because of the redevelopment thing. *Hey, I need to feel utilized . . . to have a purpose. I don’t feel that [where I am currently.]*” The second example was about a recent event. He described a redevelopment in action with a veteran non-parental volunteer. Hector told me how the church is fifteen years old and that “he’s been there since day one.” He is as “a consistent and dedicated volunteer that I can find.”

Then, he described the volunteer’s situation. “His group is now going into their senior year. So, this is his fourth group that he has taken from Freshman to Senior year. His group fizzled out last year in their junior year.” The volunteer told him that it was impossible to keep the group going considering the group’s circumstances. “It wasn’t going great for him.” I believe that was definitely a volunteer that could have *faded away*. However, Hector said that they repurposed a role for him to train other volunteers. He technically is not on staff but takes responsibilities that a staff member would have.

I found the language that Hector described next critical to my redevelopment theme. He said that he could have seen this volunteer coming one day saying, “I’ve run my course here. It’s been a good run, but it is time to call it.” Without using those words, this phrasing seemed to describe how I imagined other volunteers who *faded away*. But Hector said, “We have him a new purpose.” And according to Hector, the volunteer and the organization are all benefiting from this redevelopment.

Additionally, Hector asked, “If someone needs to be redeveloped, do they need a fresh start from where they are, or are they ready for more, or do they maybe need to step back into a lesser role? Do they just need to re-evaluate what their fit is?” I had been primarily focused on the student department, but Hector stretched the scope of redevelopment.

#### *6.6.6 Reflecting on the Discussion and Feedback: Redevelopment Theme*

Historically, I believe that I have just expected volunteers to *fade away* over time. *Rebirth* is rare and something that I never expected. When a student of a parental volunteer graduates high school, I am often not surprised by when those volunteers stop participating. However, there are other individuals who, from my perspective, just abruptly stop volunteering. Listening to volunteers’ stories, such as Michelle and

Addie, I learned how they lacked redevelopment. Then, when speaking to Matthew and Hector, I come to believe that the organization has lacked something, whether it is the knowledge, the awareness, the bandwidth, or some other number of things, to focus on redevelopment.

It took time for Hector and me to negotiate and make sense together of how redevelopment was not training. And when we got there, Hector acknowledged his lack of experience with redevelopment. Although his latest story seemed to strengthen my belief in the importance of redevelopment, I also took from Hector that re-development is (1) complex, (2) involved, and (3) you need to be paying attention to volunteers. Hector even added, “I will throw in being relationally invested with them. I wouldn’t have known about [either volunteer] if I didn’t have that relationship with them.” Though I would not argue whether being relationally invested is a pre-requisite, I can understand that such a relationship is important for people to have the ability to be attentive to other people. Ultimately, Hector was present for one of his volunteers. He helped keep him alive. He helped promote redevelopment. He journeyed beside this volunteer through *rebirth*.

There were two critical takeaways that I took from my conversation with Hector: (1) that the redevelopment scope is broader than I had first imagined (2) and redevelopment may need to become the emphasized organizational action. I will expand upon this in the next section as I discuss *translating themes into action*.

## **6.7 Translating Themes into Action**

### *6.7.1 Overview*

Action has been the most difficult part of this project as well as the easiest part of this project. I have found action difficult at times because I have struggled with the urge to force action to fit into neat boxes. This desire for neat boxes was shaped by academic literature and the neat diagrams within the literature. However, at the same time, action has also come extremely easy because each inquiry compelled some sort of future action. For example, (1) how narrative inquiry promoted *first-person research*, (2) how my inquiry with parental volunteers led my wife and me to begin transitioning out of the student department (as non-parental volunteers) towards the children’s department (as parental volunteers), (3) or, how my inquiry with Hector reshaped the emphasize

that I put on redevelopment. Each of these examples focuses on how I was provoked by the thesis research. One reason that I was provoked was that I allowed the data to resonate with me. I brought myself into the research. At times, I viewed myself symbolically of representing all of the volunteers. Yet, I am only one person. My identity is different from the identity of other volunteers. This project brought out several nuances of the volunteers. I believe that it would disparage the work within this thesis project to then oversimplify those nuances.

Additionally, I cannot test these ideas on all the volunteers. However, I do think it is very much worth pursuing. *Living* is worth pursuing. As a result, after reflecting on how to write about translating the themes into action, I have concluded to discuss it from two distinct points of view: (1) as individual action within my volunteering practice, and (2) as organizational action. Though each point of view is distinct, these two distinct points of view are also interwoven within one another. Like many other previously highlighted facets within this project, discussing these separately will appear neat. Though, in reality, it has been and is messy.

I have discussed a significant part of the individual point of view in the previous chapter, so I will only highlight how the discussions with the executive and former manager altered any planned action within my volunteering practice. The latter, organizational action, will primarily be the focus below.

#### *6.7.2 How Translating Themes into Organizational Action Changed*

The conversations with Matthew and Hector helped me realize that I had possibly misunderstood how to translate these themes into action. As the first action, I had considered that our organization first focus on obtaining the *right mix* of parental and non-parental volunteers, seek to understand volunteers' motivations, support volunteers in a manner to increase organizational commitment, and when applicable, aim to help parental volunteers that want to attach to the organization transition into non-parental volunteers as their children age out of the program. My initial position was that the parental and non-parental theme (1) was necessary to better understand the complexities of grieving volunteers, and (2) was critical to better understanding how to redevelop volunteers. However, as I will discuss more below, focusing primarily on redevelopment as the initial action has multiple potential advantages, such as (1)

focusing on simplicity first, (2) increasing volunteer stability by decreasing volunteer turnover, i.e., decreasing those who *fade away*, (3) and providing an existing redevelopment framework for later adapting the other two themes.

I was actually surprised that redevelopment was so difficult for me to initially convey. As I stated above, I think that my conversation with Hector benefited from me already discussing this theme with Matthew. I was able to better prepare for how redevelopment could be potentially misidentified as training. As a result, I believe that opened the door to new stories and different feedback from Hector. However, in many regards, I think both conversations showed me that redevelopment seems to remain a paradigm shift for part of our organization.

For example, despite Matthew and I not being able to move too far beyond discussing *training* rather than *redevelopment*, I realized that my experience with the organization has been similar to how Matthew described the Black family's experience. Matthew completely supported any volunteers who wished to transition to a different department because organizational employees do not seem to hold volunteers' hostage in any particular volunteering positions. They verbally support volunteers to freely move around to where they feel is an important place for them to volunteer. Matthew said, "it is even a healthy thing." If the organization is so supportive, *where is the disconnect between the organization and volunteers? Why do I now consider redevelopment actions a priority over other actionable themes? Why have I possibly undervalued the importance of the redevelopment theme?*

### *6.7.3 If the Organization Is So Supportive, Where Is the Disconnect Between the Organization and Volunteers?*

Kramer and Danielson (2016) argue that role development opportunities rely on context. Redevelopment is more than support. And my experience and the data within this project seem to support Kramer and Danielson's argument. I have felt trapped as a volunteer before. I have wanted a different group to mentor but knew no one else was available to act as a mentor. After Jamie left, my wife and I were the sole volunteers leading half the students because we lacked volunteers for that time slot. I recall how exhausting it was at times combining students from twelve-year-old students to seventeen-year-old in the same group. My wife and I thought that the age ranges needed

a different kind of relationship, but I felt stuck to making any changes. Addie and James talked about how *if we don't do it, who will?*

The context matters, and redevelopment needs to allow for the context for an individual to redefine their roles. From the data in chapter four, Michelle apparently needed someone to connect her to a new group of students. Addie apparently needed a role where she did not feel parental volunteers were “interfering” with her students. James apparently needed a role that required less time at the organization each week. Each looks different. As I examine these details and reflect on my own experiences, the disconnect is that, at least in part, the organizational employees believe support is the same as redevelopment. However, redevelopment, like Hector’s example, requires more than support. It also requires *role-making*, *role-taking*, and the context for both to flourish.

#### *6.7.4 Why Consider Redevelopment Actions a Priority Over Other Actionable Themes? Why Have I Possibly Undervalued the Importance of the Redevelopment Theme?*

In the previous chapter, I ended the chapter by stating that I now wanted to transition to the children’s department to volunteer and asserted I that will become a parental volunteer. The last few paragraphs of chapter five were an accumulation of all three research themes and how the themes intertwined to impact my volunteering practice. The primary action for my practice is to move departments and to volunteer in the departments that my children participate within. I believe that becoming a parental volunteer creates a *natural redevelopment path*. Role-making, role-taking, and the context appear to intersect without many obstacles.

This action and mental shift all started because of the volunteers’ stories that I heard. But, I also now believe that these stories made me partial toward the organizational importance of the parental / non-parental volunteering theme because this theme was important to *MY PRACTICE*. I believe that I undervalued the importance of the redevelopment theme because of this bias. Before my conversations with current and former organizational employees, I saw the parental and non-parental volunteer theme and the perpetual grieving theme as the two primary themes. I believed that the redevelopment theme was an actionable response to those themes.



Now, for the organization, I see redevelopment as the primary theme. However, the focus has shifted. I am no longer asking *how do volunteers manage a non-profit during the cyclical turnover of their compensated leader?* The emergent nature of the thesis and the data encouraged a shift to asking *how can volunteers be attended to.* One major idea to this research question is that we must be vigilant to redevelop. We must recognize volunteers as Human Beings. They are complex. We must care for them, be attentive, and seek to promote a *rebirth.* A shared negotiating of role-making and role-taking must occur, and it must be supportive by the context. Their identities change as well as their motivations. As a result, the parental / non-parental theme and the perpetual grieving cycle theme can provide significant light to understanding such context. When considering these themes, I believe that redevelopment becomes more proactive. I believe redevelopment can have a greater impact on volunteers' commitment, motivations, engagement, and attachment. And whether our organization ultimately transitions toward a volunteering model that Hector's organization currently uses, I believe redevelopment can support volunteers through their grieving cycles and through their *rebirth.*

## **6.8 The Summit of the Thesis**

This section will discuss what I call the summit moment of this thesis, discuss what helped me look forward rather than back, and what I ultimately discovered. As I concluded my first draft of this thesis, I previously wrote how I was near the summit admiring how far I had climbed. Rather than looking upward. I was attempting to *just finish the project.* I had collected evidence that led to what I considered three important key themes that the volunteers may need to consider to better manage the non-profit. And more importantly to me, those themes became personal. I saw my story in those themes. Then, I *tested the plausibility* of those themes.

However, I began to throttle *first-person inquiry* in this later cycle. *First-person inquiry* still occurred but I would argue that it was biased and absorbed by finishing the thesis. I even filtered out my initial thoughts and responses for this chapter to *be more scholarly.* It seemed as a "neater" thesis for the majority of my *first-person inquiry* to be written and bound into a single chapter. However, presenting oneself more scholarly is a trap that Marshall (2016) argues that researchers can easily fall into.

One day when discussing Matthew's and my conversation with my primary thesis supervisor, she made a comment that helped me relive the feelings that I felt when speaking with Matthew. As we spoke, I thought to myself, "Yes, I was trying to ignore that part of my experience!" But, using *writing as inquiry* (Marshall, 2016), there was more learning for me to unearth. I think that I was trying to ignore it because the conversations with Matthew and Hector was becoming a journey of integrating my faith. And, *how could integrating my faith be scholarly?*

When Matthew and I struggled to talk about redevelopment, this thesis was becoming more than about the research question to me. It was about the people! It is about who they were and their stories. It is about who they are and the emotions that they are presently working through. It is also about who they will become, whether change occurs because they lost part of their identity, or because of something else.

In the methodology chapter, I connected redevelopment to the process of rebirth (Zell, 2003). People live. People die. And in this process, some people have a *rebirth*. A second birth is foundational to my faith, and, frankly, ignoring the impact of my faith on this project would have ultimately been dishonest to myself and to those reading this thesis. It shapes my worldview. It sculpts and forms how I hear stories that are *relived*. It likely influenced why I was drawn to Zell's (2003) framing of *re-birth*. The foundation of my faith is secured within the believe that our invitation for rebirth is solely because of the death of my Savior. That death occurred because His attention was not on Himself but on others.

While I attempted to ignore my faith to keep the thesis outcomes "scholarly," and rather focused on finalizing the thesis, I missed why I was frustrated with Matthew. I have a perception that *rebirth* is critical for the organization. Matthew even argued that he would not choose management techniques that would allow for or endorse volunteers participating who had not experienced *rebirth* (in the context of our faith). However, I was experiencing *rebirth* more broadly. I was experiencing that volunteers, no, not just volunteers, but people, people were dying within their volunteering practice because our focus, especially mine, was elsewhere. This is the summit, the peak, of this thesis for me. Some of the people, my fellow volunteers, are fighting death around me and never experience *rebirth*, but my focus, my attention was elsewhere. And according to

my conversations with Matthew and Hector, the organization is unaware.

## 6.9 Chapter Summary

The initial aim of this chapter was to *test the plausibility* (Ramsey, 2014) of the research themes. The chapter ultimately attempted more than testing; it also aimed to guide the reader on my climb to the thesis' summit. During the majority of this thesis, I had considered the learning and change that occurred before I *tested the plausibility* of the themes as the mountaintop. There was so much of both of these that had occurred, yet, that was not the end. Matthew pushed back on the themes. However, I never experienced that his push back was specifically related to the themes as I understood them to be, but rather related to how he experienced them. He spoke about how management connected with volunteers in their grief, yet the volunteers spoke otherwise. They spoke of their pains and struggles that he insisted were heard. The volunteers spoke about being unheard, while he spoke of how volunteers resisted training. Yet, the volunteers that I spoke to yearned for redevelopment. He spoke of training conflict. I heard and recalled my own accounts of volunteers' struggle to *live*.

This journey with Matthew and my *first-person* reflections even brought into question how our organization endorses a particular identity. Though I deemed the discussion of our *identity in Christ* beyond the scope of this thesis, I believe *how we attend and care* for volunteers is at the apex of my experience. I ask myself, *how can I manage a non-profit without attentively caring for those around me who are volunteering their time?* I have witnessed volunteers *fade away*. For some of the participants within this thesis, there is evidence that their "death" lacked a *rebirth*. And from the stories that I heard, they yearned to have a *rebirth*. They, nor I, knew how to foster it.

Because there had to be more to this story (and thesis), I went outside of the organization. In my discussion, I showed how that conversation filled in many gaps that were left after I spoke with Matthew. I argued that Hector's and my conversation likely benefited from the previous dialog with Matthew. Redevelopment was likely framed more concisely, more thoughtfully. However, something else happened. Hector told a story about a key volunteer who needed *redevelopment*. Although Hector lacked the vocabulary at the time, the fact is the pattern he discussed fit the themes within this

project. And most importantly, for me, Hector paid attention to what his volunteer needed *to live*. Hector talked about how he and other managers cared for this volunteer. He told the story of his *rebirth* and how the volunteer is now thriving.

Now, when volunteers yearn for *rebirth*, I have actionable ideas to promote it and support them. When I yearn for *rebirth*, I do not believe that I will be as lost. And as shown, when I reached the summit, I realized that this thesis has become as much about me as it was about the organization. It included my experiences, my grief, my relationships, and my hope for how volunteers could be cared for in the future. I do not believe that our organization has failed, in the way this thesis argues, to care for volunteers because of apathy among the group. On the contrary, my experience is the opposite. I believe that many in the organization strive to love and care. We only lacked the knowledge and the awareness.

Now, even though I am not conclusive about whether actions to these themes function, I have ideas to illuminate areas where our organization lacked knowledge and attention. Those ideas will need to be further evaluated, but there is indication from the data that these ideas are relevant to our organizational. For example, *faded away* volunteers are invited back to volunteer in a different department. Yet, because the organization would now pursue volunteerism with awareness of people, we could collaborate with and invite parental volunteers to find a new motivational purpose as their children graduate, and create redevelopment paths for volunteers to experience, such as Hector haphazardly experienced. However, even though I have ideas to change the practice, I fully accept that the thesis concludes at the second stage of Ramsey's (2014) moments of inquiry where I am making inquiring for the practice. Though, what I did not expect is for how change would look in this project. The significant change did not happen in the organization. As I showed, it happened within me.

## Chapter 7 - Conclusion, Reflections, and Implications

### 7.1 Conclusion

As I hoped to have shown in the previous chapters, this project was highly emergent. I initially began asking the question, *how do volunteers manage a nonprofit through a leadership transition*. But after listening to the stories of other volunteers, I unconsciously began asking deeper questions. The questions became personal to me. I believe that the space and freedom of narrative interviewing allowed me to take a journey with other volunteers. Even if this journey was only at a micro-level, I imagined that I was experiencing a portion of their lives as volunteers retold parts of their stories. I saw each volunteer differently after each interview. This new perspective was not better nor worse. Rather, I believe that I saw them more deeply and as having more complexities than the lens that I was accustomed to seeing them through. I have known some of these volunteers for nearly fifteen years, but I heard stories that I never would have expected.

As I probed volunteers deeper and deeper during interviews to better understand a part of their lived experiences, it propelled me to also examine myself. Questions began to unconsciously swirl in the back of my mind. *How did I experience loss? Where did I see myself within their stories? How did I see myself differently within these stories, and why?* As I coded, analyzed, and relistened to many of their stories, I transitioned to asking those different questions more consciously. Because of the action modality chosen and the work of Marshall (2016), I also began intertwining *first-person action research* into my methodological approaches to support further investigation. This combination even allowed me to borrow from *autoethnography*. I would argue that there was a great deal of exploration during the data collection phase. Then, statements such as “*Where is the action in the project,*” “*Where is the change,*” and “*Would this real, raw account even pass a defense,*” seemed to dwell in the back of my mind.

However, there is no action plan where volunteers are looking at how to manage the non-profit differently when the next paid leader transitions into or out of the organization. As I showed in chapter four and chapter five, each interview prompted me to look at this complex problem differently. It changed me. Each subtle change

spurred me to take a different action, to speak to different people, and to ask different questions. As I will expand upon later in the chapter, action and change were happening. While planned action may have not occurred, emergent action did. Action and change were occurring continuously and were occurring within me.

Ultimately, this project aims to achieve one overarching goal: to answer *how can volunteers be attended to and cared for*. Responding to this question was achieved by learning about and improving my practice as a volunteer using pluralistic methodological approaches and engaging in *first-person* and *second-person* research. However, despite an evolution in the research question, much of the sub-questions remained intact. One potential reason that the sub-questions did not transform as much as the initial research question is that those sub-questions supported either research question. Another potential reason is that while the sub-question may not have materially changed, the meaning within those questions did transform.

For example, as I have written about through this thesis, the manner in which I understand “supporting volunteers” did transform. Rather than interpreting “supporting” as an implementation of volunteer management processes, I have interpreted “supporting” as focusing on the volunteers, as beings, their essences as people, and, dare I say, their soul. As a result, the final sub-questions are:

**Sub-question 1:** *What motivates some volunteers to contribute more time and energy to help manage the non-profit during periods of employed leadership turnover?*

**Sub-question 2:** *How can I support other volunteers’ practice and my volunteering practice in a manner to prepare us to run the non-profit when the next employed leadership change occurs?*

**Sub-question 3:** *How can the organization support volunteers run the non-profit when the next employed leadership change occurs?*

However, because of the shift to the volunteers, another sub-question emerged:

**Sub-question 4:** *What are some factors that either fatigue or energize me and other volunteers?*

Additionally, even though I highlight specific moments and dialogs in this thesis where my paradigms changed, in reality there were likely many paradigm micro-shifts

that occurred because of numerous conversations, broad literature reading, and broad reflecting that I engaged in. But, as shown in the thesis, the “watershed moments” were those times when I consciously was able to “put it all together” and could begin to consciously recognize the change that was occurring. For example, the walk and conversation with Matthew, the reflections on James’ stories as his story led me to better understand the differences of parental and non-parental volunteers, or Michelle’s raw and open accounts about being unmotivated by what I would later understand as “lack of redevelopment.” These were all important watershed moments. However, as I highlighted in the first chapter, the two major moments were: (1) Leia’s description that a leader’s departure “was like a funeral” (2) and my struggle to communicate with Matthew that my research was about the people.

As I highlighted in the previous chapters, three main themes emerged from this research thesis. I will outline those three themes again in the chapter as I (1) discuss the responses to the research problem, (2) summarize the research contributions to my practice and the actionable results that were derived from this project, (3) recap my reflections of the research, and (4) write the final implications of this research thesis. However, while I argue that these themes are important, even critical, I believe their importance is magnified within the context of the where the research thesis ended up. That is asking, *how do we attend to and care for volunteers*.

## **7.2 Response to the Research Questions, Research Contributions to Practice, and Actionable Results**

In this section, I will summarize and discuss my responses to the research questions. I use “responses to the research question” rather than “answers to the research questions” because, like Reasons (2006), I do not believe that there is a final, single answer to such complex questions. I believe that this is not a problem with a solution, but rather a question with many complex facets. Some of these facets are a response because of the data that I collected within this project.

Firstly, I wanted to re-examine my initial research question to show how the data influenced the change in the thesis’ focus. If I were to respond to *how do volunteers manage a nonprofit through a leadership transition*, I would say that: (1) Some volunteers do so in grief. (2) They do so by seeking their place and seeking a group to

connect with. (3) Some volunteers do so with high motivation, while others will do so with low motivation. (4) Some do so while attached to the organization, while others do so attached elsewhere. (5) Some volunteers manage the non-profit committed to the organizational goals, while others manage the non-profit with their commitment elsewhere. I argue that these responses are representative of the shift in the research focus away from volunteer management and towards the volunteers. They represent how the focus is now on the humanity of the volunteers.

Additionally, I think it is important here to highlight that I believe that a greater commitment to the organization is neither good nor bad. To me, it could appear easy for others to paint this response as vain or an attempt to paint myself in a positive light. But, that is not my intent. Through this project, I have learned that even my commitment changes over time. For example, for many years, I was much more committed to a group of students rather than the organization. However, those students graduated. I celebrated important milestones within those students' lives, I grieved those losses, and I unconsciously redeveloped as a volunteer.

Somewhere within redeveloping, my commitment to the organization increased. But, this commitment appears to be fluid and may change as different responsibilities compete with one another in a volunteer's life. I also learned within this project how the parental participants' children were an important competitor to their commitment to the organization. Before this project, I considered a volunteer's commitment to their children and a volunteer's commitment to an organization as mutually exclusive. But in the lives of the participants of this research thesis, each competed with one another on some level. Here, with these complexities, I ask, *how can these volunteers be attended to?*

This final research question leads to discussing some responses to the sub-questions. **One response** is to help myself and other volunteers better understand our various commitments so we can find how to better engage volunteers in a manner that is motivating for them. I became aware of how volunteers' motivation, engagement, and commitment are more nuanced than I previously understood. I saw in the data how two groups of volunteers discussed their stories differently. What emerged was my bifurcating these two groups into parental and non-parental volunteers. I also



recognized while I reflected on James' stories how I am both a parental and non-parental volunteer. Within this site organization, I am a non-parental volunteer. However, I also volunteer as my son's soccer coach. I recalled how I have responded to volunteering obstacles differently within the two sites and how I experience fatigue and joy slightly differently when volunteering. I believe that James' stories provided an excellent example of these two groups and how these two groups may need to be engaged differently. As I am writing this conclusion, James' youngest child has graduated and is no longer part of the youth. James has been a volunteer since the early 1990's, before either of his children were born. However, since his youngest son's graduation, James has not volunteered in nearly three months.

**Two other responses** to the sub-questions focus on grief and redevelopment. However, these two responses also are responses to the other sub-questions. One of the primary themes that emerged where the organization could better support volunteers to manage the non-profit during employed leadership change was redevelopment. As I discussed in the previous chapters, the stories of Michelle and Addie brought this theme to the forefront. One idea from this thesis is to connect with either of these two former volunteers and discuss what I have been learning and invite them to journey alongside me as we further explore these themes. A simple invitation, *"I haven't been attentive to you, other volunteers, nor even to myself. I believe that by not caring for volunteers that our lives as volunteers die. Would you walk beside me as we explore how to care for ourselves as a volunteer and for other volunteers?"* Redevelopment is one lens that we can use in this journey, but I believe that it could be something that some people may need to experience before they can understand it.

For example, I later met with Matthew to discuss the major themes within this project and to engage in deeper dialog. I discovered that he held the belief that most volunteers fought redevelopment during organizational change. As a result, he questioned whether redevelopment was an important theme. As I highlighted in our dialog in the previous chapters (chapter six), we each began to see the topic differently as we discussed it more deeply. We agreed that volunteers in other departments may have different motivations, and so he believed they are resistant to redevelopment.

Some of the people that he named have volunteered for the organization for decades.

He described them by saying that “they are comfortable.” However, our discussion highlighted how the volunteers for the youth (where I volunteer) were different than any other volunteers within the organization. The volunteers who work with the youth had no choice but to change. Employed leaders come and go routinely, unlike any other department within the organization. Kids of parental volunteers will graduate. Many times, those parental volunteers cease to volunteer once their children no longer participate. As a result, I believe that it is misguided for the organization to dismiss the volunteers for the youth as *unwilling to be redeveloped*. As Michelle and Addie discussed, they are seeking redevelopment. As I learned from deeper reflection, I think that they were seeking *to live* as a volunteer. But, we lacked the awareness to care for them. Or, at least, my experience was that I lacked the awareness to care for them and others lacked the awareness to care for me. And so, I was not surprised that like all volunteers, these volunteers have also spoken heavily about grief.

Grief is the last major theme that emerged. Grief, along with lack of redevelopment and parental/non-parental volunteer conflict, was also a factor that fatigued the volunteers. By contrast, every volunteer discussed the importance of and told stories about how important mentoring students was to them. James called it “feeling wanted and needed.” Leah retold stories about relationships that are now decades old. And each volunteer discussed the impact of loss when they lost those relationships, especially during times of leadership transition. Michelle and Addie’s stories about their loss when the youth graduated seemed to reflect stories of bitter sweetness. Michelle said, “I felt like I had an impact.” Addie retold graduations and wedding events. But, the loss from when students left and relationships were cut short because of leadership transition sounded different to me. As Addie said, “I don’t have a place.” Or as Michelle recalled regrettably, “My girls just stopped coming.”

I do not believe recognizing and talking about volunteers’ grief is sufficient. When Matthew and I talked, he highlighted that he and the other executives routinely engage volunteers about any potential grief with changes. I even recall him checking on my wife and me many times. However, personally, I never realized how much I was grieving until this project. Also, even if other volunteers recognized their grief, it appears that our organization lacks the tools to aid volunteers. As Kramer and Danielson (2016) highlight and because of my conversation with Hector (see chapter six), I believe

redevelopment may be one key to volunteers helping other volunteers work through change and grief. And while it also may be the tool to help volunteers manage the non-profit, it appears to be a critical tool to attend to and care for volunteers. As I showed in the data, the volunteers seemed to be willing to describe how they needed to be attended to.

### **7.3 Research Implications for Other Organizations**

The research implications, discussed in the previous section, may have broader importance outside of the research site. In this section, I will discuss the potential implication for other organizations that have volunteers. This discussion will examine (1) like-kind organizations as well as (2) non-like-kind organizations.

As I described the context of the organization in chapter one, the research site is a religious organization, i.e., a local church, and the focus of the research was with participants who volunteered within the youth ministry segment. As a result, I define like-kind organizations as other Christian churches within the United States who also have a youth ministry department. I narrowed the definition of like-kind because these organizations tend to use similar youth ministry models, are culturally and structurally similar, and also experience similar leadership turnover rates (DeVries, 2010; Fields, 2009; Goreham, 2004).

Based on the work of Fields (2009) and my interview with Hector, I argue that these themes are worth considering for like-kind organizations. Parental and non-parental volunteers exist. The high leadership turnover (Fields, 2009) likely influences grief and the need for re-development. I recall the many youth ministry training sessions that I've attended as a volunteer. One of the first comments by the speaker usually mentions how youth ministry volunteering is one of the hardest places to volunteer. Recalling the repetitive nature of those words through the lens of this thesis, I now question whether other organizations struggle to attend to youth ministry volunteers. *Is it hard because youth ministry volunteers are not cared for or attended to?* This question cannot be answered within this thesis. However, I believe these themes are worth pursuing for other like-kind organizations.

Though, it appears then that the research implications are limited to a narrow segment of volunteers within Christian organizations. *Maybe.* However, in chapter four,

I retell how James urged that volunteers desire to be “needed, wanted, and loved,” how Addie discusses that she is now lacking a purpose in the group, and how Michelle describes needing “an anchor” to the group. I argue that the volunteers’ grief and desire for redevelopment may be applied to volunteers and organizations in a broader context.

When I listened to the volunteers’ stories, yes, they resonated with me as a youth ministry volunteer, but they also resonated with me as a human being. And while the parental and non-parental theme may be contextualized to similar, like-kind organizations, the broader importance, when asking *how do we attend to our volunteers*, is more than just understanding the research themes, such as that parental and non-parental volunteers exist. I argue that the broader implication is that we, as human beings, have complex motivations, commitments, and attachments that may even, at times, be competing with one another. For example, Michelle said, that “If it wasn’t for the students, I would quit.” She also described herself as “just tired” while stating that she volunteered “to make a difference.” The nuances seem critical to how best to attend to Michelle. Like Hector when he attended to one of his volunteers, discussed in chapter six, he described how he paid attention to the nuances.

Through the lens of this thesis, I must also ask, *how are those (non-like-kind) organizations attending to their volunteers?* For example, I wrote in chapter two how some volunteers disengage because they become jaded. Their jadedness then promotes emotional detachment (McAllum, 2018). The data within this thesis showed moments of disengagement and reengagement. The data retold some of the volunteers’ stories before they would have become *unreliable* (Cnaan and Cascio, 1998; Vantilborgh and Van Puyvelde, 2018) and, therefore, later *fading away*. As a result of the data within this thesis, I better understand the arguments from the literature review that state volunteers can be *unreliable* (Cnaan and Cascio, 1998; Vantilborgh and Van Puyvelde, 2018). However, the data also outlined the importance for organizations to *attend to* their volunteers. Like Hector noticing his volunteer was becoming disengaged, in chapter six, it tells of the *rebirth* that Hector’s volunteer experienced because Hector *attended to* him.

The implication for other organizations is that all volunteers likely need to be

attended to in some form or some fashion. For non-like-kind organizations, attending to their volunteers can potential be summarized by James' comment of making volunteers feel "needed, wanted, and loved." Redevelopment likely remained a critical component to accomplish this. The grief that volunteers experience is likely contextualized. For instance, when Matthew and I discussed the differences between youth ministry volunteers or volunteers in other departments, the grieving cycles are likely different. Similarly, the parental and non-parental volunteer theme is also likely highly contextualized to like-kind organizations. Though, there are other organizations to which this theme could have implications, such as volunteers in youth sports. Despite the contextual differences, I also argue that *attending to* volunteer is worth pursuing and potentially relevant to non-like-kind organizations.

Additionally, the broader implication that would need more investigation is the complexities of identities. As I wrote in the literature review, Chacón *et al.* (2007) argue that the Role Identity Model is an important predictor of sustainable volunteerism, meaning individuals who volunteer for more than 24 months are likely to identify as volunteers. As a result, the authors emphasize the importance for organizations to promote individuals to adopt the identity as a volunteer.

However, I argue that Chacón *et al.* (2007) findings did not survive inquiry as the data within this thesis outlined complexities and subtleties that compete with the researchers' argument. First, the thesis data showed that some of our volunteers who identified themselves as volunteers, therefore leading to sustainable volunteerism, seemed to need their identity *attended to*. Identifying as a volunteer was not necessary sufficient to achieve sustainable volunteerism. I speculate that other volunteers, even for non-like-kind organizations, also need their identity as a volunteer *attended to*. I am left asking *how long did "long term" volunteers in Chacón et al. (2007) research continue to volunteer after the 24-month period? How many stopped volunteering because they felt unattended to?*

Second, there are competing identities, such as with James' story (chapter four) or with my own story (chapter five), that, if ignored, may likely lead to volunteer turnover or lead to volunteers transitioning into another role elsewhere. Much of literature, like Chacón *et al.* (2007), seem to show volunteerism as binary. Individuals identify as a

volunteer or they do not, are engaged or not, are attached or not attached, and are motivated or unmotivated. I show volunteers who are struggling while also celebrating. They are grieving some lost piece of their volunteering practice but are hopeful for a *rebirth*. They not only identify as volunteers but also as parents, friends, coaches, and much more. Even before I started the interviews, I only recognized the participants as “volunteers.” I argue that, like me, other organizations whether like-kind or not, also struggle to see the individuals for more than “volunteers,” struggle to see their humanity, and, therefore, struggle to *attend to* them. As a result, even though who identity as a volunteer may *fade away* because of the lack of attentiveness.

#### **7.4 Methodological Contribution to the Managerial Practice**

When I began this research thesis, I remember contemplating about potential contributions. I recall daydreaming and desiring that the research serve for more than earning a degree. I wanted the knowledge gained to matter. I had hoped that knowledge would be generated that would impact the practical and theoretical. I never envisioned that the thesis could contribute methodologically. However, next, I will show the methodological contribution to the managerial practice of *first-person inquiry* and its impact for conducting insider research.

Brannick and Coghlan (2007) write that insider research is that which is performed by members of an organization and is performed inside and on the organization. Literature debates whether insiders are qualified (Anderson and Herr, 1999; Brannick and Coghlan, 2007). Rather than re-litigating such an argument, I hold the position that insiders are qualified and that insider research can be doctoral (Coghlan, Coughlan, and Shani, 2019).

Granted, challenges do exist to insider research. Coghlan and Brydon-Miller (2014) highlight four challenges to such research: (1) access (2) pre-understanding (3) role duality, and (4) organizational politics. However, I also experienced a fifth challenge, (5) emotional openness. Because of this fifth challenge, I now take a *cautionary* position in regard to insider research. Reflecting on my own experience, I believe that I would have lacked the emotional competency and awareness to have engaged in such rich and demanding research required by this thesis just a decade before. The aggregate of chapters four, five, and six not only show where I struggled emotionally at times but

also show how emotional openness allowed for narrative stories to be *retold* and *relived*.

A decade ago, had I spoken with Matthew, I imagine myself brushing our conflict off as “him not getting it.” I imagine myself listening to Michelle’s story, her pain, and trying to escape the uncomfortableness of those moments. I would have likely “tried to fix it.” This approach not only may have dishonored Michelle’s story but also would have likely degraded the data quality. When listening to Leia’s description of her grief during her first leadership transition, rather than explore my own grief, I imagine that I would have likely attempted to flee my own emotional experience. As I showed in previous chapters, avoiding those experiences would have likely been a barrier to what the research was becoming.

A similar picture is discussed by Ross (2017). She writes about her emotional challenges with insider research. And though she does not argue, like I am here, that the researcher’s emotional openness / competency can be a challenge, she shows how such a deficit can hinder the research. Granted, there are those who argue for emotional distance, such as Greene (citing Taylor, 2011, 2014), who argues that emotional attachment can make objectivity difficult and that it is a barrier to analytical distance. Greene (2014) responds by suggesting self-critique and reflexivity as tools to aid the insider to create such distance. I show in chapter five that self-critique and reflexivity were important tools. However, I argue that they were tools not because they created distance but rather gave perspective and insight. As I wrote using the illustration of Peter Pan’s shadow, self-critique and reflexivity allowed me to move closer to the research rather than seeking to “become objective.” I show in this thesis how I became part of the research, but I also show methodologically how rich data can emerge through that process by relying on *first-person inquiry*.

Coghlan and Brydon-Miller (2014) write that *first-person inquiry* gives conscious attention to one’s “intention, strategies, and behavior and the effects of their action on themselves and their situation” (2014, p. 349). It allows the researcher to “know by experiencing ourselves as subjects” (2014, p. 350). As Marshall describes *living life as inquiry*, which relies heavily on *first-person inquiry*, it is both a challenge but also an invitation. It is demanding but aspirational (2016). As a result, I reiterate for the researcher to be *cautious* as such research may demand emotional challenges that the

researcher desires to avoid. However, for those willing, I show how *first-person inquiry* can be leveraged not to just compliment insider research but to augment it. And for those willing, I show that *first-person inquiry* can support what I call the fifth insider research challenge, emotional openness.

I do also fully acknowledge that the fifth challenge to insider research could be dependent upon the methods that an insider utilizes. Like myself, Ross (2017) also used narrative interviews. Further research would be necessary to confirm whether this fifth challenge extends outside of narrative interviewing or whether my and Ross' (2017) experience were unique to our context. Either way, the contribution emphasizes the important role that *first-person inquiry* plays for managerial insider research because it can support emotional openness, promote learning, and develop knowledge.

In many regards, I believe Torbert's (2006) argument about *first-person research* is relevant to insider research. Torbert strongly emphasizes that reading about *first-person research* does not generate the capacity for actually doing it. He argues that we often must rely on personal guidance to assist us as we endeavor on attention exercise. (2006, p. 255). He even echoes my concern for the pretentious tone (Torbert, 2006). Yet, I argue that this thesis contributes to the managerial practice of insider research because it illustrates how to leverage *first-person inquiry* and how powerful such a tool can be for inquiry. One reason that this tool may have been powerful in this thesis is that it promotes mindfulness. Ramsey highlights that *first-person action research* is one model that encourages mindfulness in practice-centered learning programs (citing Marshall, 1999, 2001, 2014, p. 10). Using Marshall's (2016) proposed *attentional disciplines*, researchers can attend to our practice in relation to our context (Ramsey, 2014, p. 10). As a result, for the willing practitioners, *first-person inquiry* may aid insider researchers to overcome emotional constraints, foster mindfulness, and potentially steer him or her towards a *scholarship of practice* (Ramsey, 2014).

## **7.5 Reflecting on the Research**

Part of me believes that I could write another thesis on my reflections of this research journey. Though my adviser never stated it, I sense that her approach throughout my project echoed Whitehead's (2000) encouragement for students to engage with multiple methodological approaches, so students can find their own voices



and own living theories.

*Have I found my own voice?* Yes. Throughout this entire project, my biggest concern had been whether I was *checking the correct boxes* to obtain my degree. My adviser rarely discussed these “*boxes*” and encouraged me to read broadly. I laugh as I am writing this because I have two large stacks of books beside me that serve as a reminder of how broad this journey has been. But, I was able to *play with theory* (Kim, 2015) because of this process. Though, as Ramsey argues, there is “little scholarly about ‘playing’ with ideas” (2014, p. 15) unless those ideas were engaged intentionally, robustly, and with an inquiry that is evaluative (Ramsey, 2014, p. 15).

To achieve more than *playing*, I initially began collecting data using narrative inquiry. The research design is aimed at quality and rigor as outlined in the methodology chapter. The stories provided significant data to help me address my initial question. I also began asking personal questions during the narrative inquires. I could have left those personal questions unanswered. I could have bound my research to my initial question and “wrapped up” my project. I imagine that my supervisor may have even told me that “it is a perfectly fine” approach if I continued that initial path.

However, as I hoped this thesis shows, my practice as a volunteer would have looked very different than what it will now look like going forward. I would have likely had an attractive action plan that would have likely set in a desk drawer somewhere. But now, after this journey of *inquiry*, change has occurred. I imagine the volunteers who need attention, who need care. I recall the volunteers who had children that were about to graduate. They grieved the change that was coming to their house. They may have even grieved losing their place volunteering. *Did they feel that nothing was here for them volunteering without their child?* Many of those volunteers feel like family to me. Yet, I have never slowed down enough to ask that question after all the years volunteering together.

I also foresee the newer volunteers. From a distance, I picture them just finding their place. *What happens when they lose that group that they just connected to? Should we not care for them now, so they are prepared for that loss?* And, I also see the volunteers who *faded away*. We chat about all our good memories together. Yet, there are moments that I sense a cloud hanging over the conversation. *Do they feel that they did not finish*

*well? Do they blame themselves?*

These questions cannot be answered within this project. However, I have come to believe that such questions are what need to be considered to care for those people around us. They are more than volunteers. I have come to recognize their humanity that I had not noticed before. They are human beings who desire life. I have come to see the themes as a lens to help support such a journey.

## **7.6 Reflexivity in the Research Thesis**

This thesis contains several sections that outline and discuss my reflections on the conversations that I had, the themes that emerged, and how I was responding to those. The role and influence of reflexivity have been discussed less so. I argue that part of the reason that reflexivity's focus has been pushed to the background is because the reflexive practice has extended all throughout the thesis, such as when I discussed my fingerprints on the data, discussed how my interpretation of the data further promoted deeper *first-person* research, or discussed the secondary themes. In Holman Jones *et. al*, the authors advocate that *autoethnography* actually becomes a cycle of endless reflection on reflexivity since it continues to reopen the text for further scrutiny, interpretation, and negotiating (2016, p. 157). Whereas reflection promotes mindful introspection, reflexivity involves examining how the relationship between the researcher, the settings, and the co-participants are influencing one another (Holman Jones *et. al*, 2016, p. 73).

As I intertwined my reflections and reflexivity throughout the chapters, I believe one of the biggest influences that the participants had on me was to compel me to relive my own *lived experiences*. And in turn, as I showed, my *reliving* shaped later interviews, how I coded, and what my attention was drawn toward. As I read the literature and spoke with my thesis supervisor, it seems that we, as academics, focus more on how the researchers influence the data. But, I also tell the reflexivity story of reciprocity and how the data was also influencing me.

For example, as I was compelled toward *reliving*, particular themes resonated with me. It was this reverberation that fueled my sense that something was missing after my conversation with Matthew led to a second conversation. It was analytical because inconsistency existed between Matthew's perspective and the volunteers' perspective.

But, it was also emotive. I *relived* and experienced something different than what Matthew was describing. Then, my assumption that Hector's dialog revealed sufficient light on the thesis impeded likely further investigation. Analytically, coherence emerged from this *testing of the plausibility* (Ramsey, 2014; Saldana, 2016). But because of the deep connection that the data had on me, (Riessman, 1993), it also resonated with me. And lastly, as the thesis evolved, I spoke earlier about how my own theological underpinnings were shaped by the conversations and likely influenced how data was interpreted. All of this led to a summit moment where I found myself directly in the center. Influencing the thesis. The thesis influencing me.

### **7.7 Summary**

Frankly, this section may be the hardest section of the project to write. In reality, the final implications and impact of this project are much greater than could be described within the scope and limitations of this thesis. The thesis began with my focusing on volunteers and volunteer management, but it concluded with my focusing on people. My attention shifted. So, *how do I evaluate that this thesis has become about people rather than processes to me?*

For me, I consider Ramsey's work on the scholarship of practice. While I have regularly used attention in this thesis to describe what I am focusing on, Ramsey seems to describe it more richly. It is the key to relating ideas, practice, and context. It involves mindfulness. It is the process to which to develop a scholarly practice (2014, p. 7). From here, Ramsey argues that a scholarship of practice is composed of three domains of attention. She identities the domains as (1) an engagement with ideas, (2) a practice of inquiry, and (3) a navigation of relations (2014, p. 7).

As a result, I would argue that this thesis reflects the practice of each of these domains. I engaged with the ideas of literature and data. I practiced inquiry with others and by myself. I showed how each inquiry informed the other. I navigated relations. As with the example with Matthew, such navigation informed the research.

However, there are other impacts and implications within the scope of the emerged themes. One impact is that I have recognized the continuous grieving cycle that many volunteers, including myself, have been a part of because of the volatility of leadership changes. I have learned that I have been able to continue to volunteer and work through

some of my grief because of my access to redevelopment. However, I have seen how some other volunteers may have stopped volunteering because they were not redeveloped and were possibly burdened by the grief to continue volunteering. I have already begun conversations with one of the organizational executives about how to support volunteer redevelopment in the future. Though, as I explained in chapter five, I am no longer volunteering as a non-parental volunteer but transitioning to be a parental volunteer.

Another impact is learning about the deeper subtleties of how volunteers and I are motivated to volunteer. I now look at many volunteers in our organization through the lens of parental and non-parental volunteers. Though these groups may have similarities, as a non-parental volunteer within the organization, I am likely to volunteer because of different motivational factors than parental volunteers. In regard to the research question and to what factors influenced me to volunteer, I lacked the motivation to volunteer because of my children and had motivations from a different source.

Even though the degree to which parental parents are motivated to volunteer because of their children is beyond the scope of this project, I do think using this lens to discuss volunteerism within our organization can be helpful. I believe that this frame can help us recruit volunteers because we can better access their motivations. I also believe that this lens can be leveraged to support non-parental volunteers to commit long-term to the organization. As a result, it may also help us explain the conflict between particular volunteers, especially during times of leadership transition and turnover.

The last implication that I will highlight is that I continued to volunteer because I was unconsciously unaware and largely unaffected by structural obstacles that some other volunteers were impacted by. For example, as James and Addie described, the organization continues to ask for more and more time from the volunteers. Or, how Michelle and Addie felt that the non-parental parents often felt unheard. Or, how Leia explained the impact of the lack of communication from executives specific to leadership changes. She retold how she thought that the volunteers are the ones who were left *picking up the pieces*. Leia is the only participant in this project who is still

volunteering in the student department.

In summary, I volunteer because of many competing and complex reasons, such as my commitment to the organization. But, I learned that the reasons that I have volunteered changed over time. Over the years, I was once more committed to a group of students more than the organization. Redevelopment helped me work through my grief, and in that process, I became more committed to the organization. Most participants in this research thesis had more *years of service* than most other volunteers. Yet, by the end of writing this chapter, most of those volunteers had stopped volunteering or moved departments. Helping the organization focus on redeveloping volunteers, removing structural obstacles, and possibly engaging with volunteering on how they are most motivated (parental vs non-parental) could have long-term positive outcomes.

As a result, these themes leave me excited, anxious, and thankful, so theory is only one piece to this thesis. I am excited about the potential impact the themes could have on other volunteers. I am anxious because of the vulnerability and attention that these themes are likely to demand from those who build a practice upon them. And, I am thankful for the critical change that has occurred in my life. I began this thesis distant, afar. I was focused on theory. I am concluding it having had experienced life-changing inquiry. Theory and practice are interwoven, with change existing throughout. Ironically, I would ultimately describe this thesis journey as a revival. My attention is no longer on asking *how do we manage* but is on something more meaningful to me. I am left declaring, *attend to and care for volunteers because like in our faith, individuals are seeking rebirth and life.*

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# **APPENDIX 1: Participant Information Sheet**

## **Participant information sheet**

To Whom To It May Concern:

You are being invited to participate in a research study on Volunteerism within the youth at Organization XYZ. Before you decide whether to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Additionally, at any time that you would like more information or if there is anything that you do not understand, please feel free to ask me when you see me in person or you can call me at the provided telephone numbers.

Please also feel free to discuss this with your family, friends, and any other people that you feel comfortable counseling you. I would like to stress that you do not have to accept this invitation and should only agree to take part if you desire too. I will assume that if I do not hear confirmation on your desired participation within three weeks that you do not wish to participate within this research project.

Thank you for reading this,

Jeremy Slayton

## **Section 1 – General Information Regarding Research Project**

The following section will discuss the purpose of the research project, how participants were chosen, whether you are required to participate, and what will happen within the research project.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to investigate volunteerism using narrative interviews as well as use action research to facilitate a transition towards sustainable volunteerism that is independent of a compensated leader.

Meaning, I am looking to understand the volunteer's experiences within Organization XYZ when the full-time, employed leader exits the organization. The volunteer's experiences will be vital to understanding how volunteer's must continue running their segment of the organization, but then later must transition back into their previous roles when a new leader is hired. This cyclical pattern changes the dynamics of how the organization runs and leads to high ups and downs within the youth. After having a greater understanding, I will develop action that will lead the group towards sustainable volunteerism. To me, sustainable volunteerism is where the volunteer operations of the non-profit is running smoothly despite whether the full-time, compensated leader position is in transition or not.

### **Why have I been chosen to take part?**

You have been asked to participate because you are an adult volunteer that, on average, volunteers for the youth within Organization XYZ for a minimum of 45 hours per month. Less than 12 individuals, in total, have been invited.

### **Do I have to take part?**

No, it is important for you to know that this is only an invitation and is voluntary. If you choose to participate, you will be free to withdraw from participating at any time, without explanation, and without incurring a disadvantage.

**What will happen if I take part?**

If you choose to participate, your primary responsibility will be to partake in a series of interviews with the researcher, Jeremy Slayton. These interviews will occur in a narrative form. This means that the interviews will be open ended in nature and will involve you, the participant, to discuss your experiences in a story format. The focus of these interviews will be centered on your experiences as a volunteer or as the full-time leader within Organization XYZ. No preparation is required for the interviews.

I would suggest that you plan for approximately an hour for each interview. I also anticipate that I will need approximately five to six interviews. However, though unlikely that ten will be required, the total number of interviews will not exceed ten. These interviews will be planned to occur on a routine basis. In this case, interviews are planned every three weeks. The interviews will be recorded either via an audio or video format. Additionally, the entire data collection and action phases of the research is anticipated to last approximately six months.

## Section 2 – General Information Regarding Data Collected

The following section will discuss the how the data that you provide will be used, privacy will be guarded, and any limits to confidentiality.

### How will my data be used?

The research report will not include names and that the data will not be used for any purposes other than the research project. The researcher will use a coding system, so a participant with the name Jane may be called James. The researcher will be the only individual with access to the key of the coding system.

Please see the table below for additional questions and the corresponding answers to how data will be used and privacy will be maintained:

How will my data be collected?	<p>The primary method that data will be collected is via audio / video formats.</p> <p>However, because research will be emergent, we will likely have informal conversations outside of a formal interview. As a result, data may be collected during those informal dialogue, such as phone calls or emails, and the researcher will make you aware within the conversation if the data will be saved for research purposes.</p>
How will my data be stored?	<p>The data will be stored electronically. It will be stored on an encrypted device and password protected.</p>
How long will my data be stored for?	<p>Data will be stored for five years so the University has the ability to substantiate any data to support the thesis findings.</p>
What measures are in place to protect the security and confidentiality of my data?	<p>After interviews are completed, the audio/video files will be transferred to an encrypted hard drive.</p> <p>Files will be label using a key (i.e. false names replacing actual names) so that information will be anonymous.</p>

Will my data be anonymised?	Yes, your data will be anonymized. Any quotes or commits used within the research papers will also protect your identity.
How will my data be used?	The data that you provide will be used in the research project on volunteerism and how volunteers must continue running an organization when compensated leaders are absent, due to transition.
Who will have access to my data?	The researcher, Jeremy, will only have access to the data. In rare cases, the University may request data to substantiate the quality of the research being performed.
Will my data be archived for use in other research projects in the future?	No, your data will not be archived for future projects.
How will my data be destroyed?	Yes, once the thesis is finalized and the five-year window closes, all data will be delete and destroyed.

**Are their limits to confidentiality?**

Yes, at any time, if any information is revealed that falls under *mandatory reporting laws*, the researcher will report such information to the appropriate levels of authority. Such items may include, but are not limited to, child abuse or other criminal activities.



## **Section 3 –Information Regarding Risk and Benefits of Involvement**

The following section discusses risks and benefits involved in the research project as well as an explanation of what will occur with the results of the study.

### **Are there any risks in taking part?**

There are not any perceived disadvantages or risks involved in participating in the research project outside of your normal daily life. Your participation will primarily involve narrative interviews in which you will tell stories of your experiences as a volunteer or full-time employee at Organization XYZ. The focus on the research is on the organization and is non-commercial.

### **Are there any benefits in taking part?**

Yes, the benefit for taking part of the research project is to help the organization to run smoother despite whether or not the youth leader position is in transition.

### **Expenses and / or payments**

Participations will not encounter expenses while participating within this research. As a result, participants will not receive any payments for participating in this search project.

### **What will happen to the results of the study?**

As data is being collected and analyzed, the action research phase will emerge. Initial analysis of the data will be discussed participations. As the action project occurs, additional interviews will occur to obtain feedback. Once the thesis document written, all participations will likely have access to the finalized thesis via email request.

All participants will be anonymous and will not be identifiable within any research publications. However, if data emerges where particular events cannot be anonymized but are necessary to the research findings, such information will not be made available

to read within the request report. Additional, if this does occur, the thesis will not be published and will only be available to those who will be reviewing the thesis.

## **Section 4 –Information Regarding Potential Problems and Remedies**

Below are several questions and answers regarding potential problems, how to stop participation, how to gain additional information:

### **What will happen if you want to stop taking part of the research project?**

It is important for you to know that you are able to withdraw from participating in the research study at any time. You are also free from giving any explanation.

Results up to the period of withdrawal may be used, if participants are happy for this to be done. Otherwise participants may request that the results are destroyed and no further use is made of them. However, interviews may be anonymized. As a result, any transcribed interviews that are anonymized can no longer be withdrawn.

If you wish to withdraw for any reasons, you can do so verbally or written. However, it is suggest to email the researcher at [jeremy.slayton@online.liverpool.ac.uk](mailto:jeremy.slayton@online.liverpool.ac.uk) informing the researcher that you wish to withdraw. No reason is necessary.

### **What if you become unhappy or if you encounter a problem?**

If you are unhappy, or if there is a problem, please feel free to let us know by contacting Caroline Ramsey [+44 (0)151 795 0664] and she will try to help. If you remain unhappy or have a complaint which you feel you cannot come to us with then you should contact the Research Ethics and Integrity Office at [ethics@liv.ac.uk](mailto:ethics@liv.ac.uk) or [liverpoolethics@ohecampus.com](mailto:liverpoolethics@ohecampus.com). When contacting the Research Ethics and Integrity Office, please provide details of the name or description of the study (so that it can be identified), the researcher(s) involved, and the details of the complaint you wish to make.

The University strives to maintain the highest standards of rigour in the processing of your data. However, if you have any concerns about the way in which the University

processes your personal data, it is important that you are aware of your right to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office by calling 0303 123 1113.

**Who can I contact if I have further questions?**

Jeremy Slayton

Address

Telephone

[jeremy.slayton@online.liverpool.ac.uk](mailto:jeremy.slayton@online.liverpool.ac.uk)

# APPENDIX 2: Consent Form

## Participant consent form

**Version number & date:** V1 – March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2019

**Research ethics approval number:** Approval Granted on October 16<sup>th</sup> 2019

**Title of the research project:** How do volunteers run a non-profit during the cyclical turnover of their compensated leader?

**Name of researcher(s):** Jeremy Slayton

Please

initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2019 for the above study, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
2. I understand that taking part in the study involves narrative interviews that will be primarily recorded (audio but also possibly video) individually. However, I understand that some interviews, dialogues, and conversations may occur in more informal settings, such as emails, telephone calls, and group discussions.
3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to stop taking part and can withdraw from the study at any time without giving any reason and without my rights being affected. In addition, I understand that I am free to decline to answer any particular question or questions.
4. I understand that I can ask for access to the information I provide and I can request the destruction of that information if I wish at any time prior to submission of the thesis. I understand that following submission of the thesis I will no longer be able to request access to or withdrawal of the information I provide.
5. I understand that the information I provide will be held securely and in line with data protection requirements at the University of Liverpool until it is fully anonymised.
6. I understand that signed consent forms and interviews (audio/video), emails, and transcripts will be retained in by the researcher (Jeremy) in a secure location for up to five years after thesis is finalized.
7. I agree that my information can be anonymously quoted in research outputs, such as research thesis.
8. I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my fully anonymised responses.



### APPENDIX 3: Coding Example and List

This chapter includes (1) screenshot examples of the captured transcripts, (2) an example of how the data was analyzed and synthesized, and (3) the filtered codes that led to the three primary themes.

As discussed in chapter four, this filtered codes were derived from the transcript and codes were generating using *lumping*. See Figure 5 and Figure 6 for an example of the coding performed with Addie's and Leia's conversations. Using *Excel*, I coded key words within the first cycle. Through relistening to the interviews, another cycle of coding occurred. This second cycle occurred after all of the first set and second set of interviews were performed. However, as mentioned in chapter four, subsuming and using repeating codes promoted fewer codes that could be more easily managed and analyzed.

However, as discussed in previous chapters, these themes emerged by analyzing the data sequentially, thematically, and structurally coherently (cited Gee in Patterson, 1991, 2013, p. 40). But as I showed in chapter five, it also occurred by emoting and alongside *first-person writing* (Marshall, 2016). Coherence was not just bound to the volunteers' stories. Coherence included my own story, included how I was *engaging with ideas* (Ramsey, 2014), and included how my *attention* (Ramsey, 2014) was evolving. As shown in the two figures below and by the data in chapter four and chapter five, Leia's response informed my own story. Her words resonated with me. It promoted me to *relive* volunteering as my son's soccer coach. And in turn, this *first-person inquiry* likely influenced how I interpreted Addie's conflict. Then, as I *tested the plausibility* (Ramsey, 2014) of these themes, they seemed to made sense, in part, to an executive and a manager.

**Figure 5 - Transcript Segment and Coding #1**

Labovian Mode	Type	Transcript	Interview	Order	Cycling 1 Codin	Cycling 2 Codin	Subsuming	Theme	Participant
Result	Transcription Summary	in the first instance	Interview 1	16					Addie
Result	Transcription Summary	was best case scenario, volunteers and other staff came together	Interview 1	17					Addie
Result	Transcription Summary	I felt like everyone was on the same page	Interview 1	18	on the same page	plan of action			Addie
Result	Transcription Summary	and trying to do what was best for the students	Interview 1	19	on same page				Addie
Result	Transcription Summary	Not only keeping things going	Interview 1	20					Addie
Result	Transcription Summary	but actually improve upon the programs that were in place before	Interview 1	21					Addie
Result	Transcription Summary	really creating something new	Interview 1	22	creating something				Addie
Result	Transcription Summary	and everyone doing what was needed	Interview 1	23		what was needed			Addie
Result	Transcription Summary	without complaint or reservation	Interview 1	24					Addie
Result	Transcription Summary	I think the second instance	Interview 1	25					Addie
Result	Transcription Summary	things kind of unraveled, in some way	Interview 1	26	unraveled				Addie
Abstract	Transcription Summary	I think there were issues brewing under the surface	Interview 1	27	brewing under the surface	brewing under the surface	brewing under the surface		Addie
Abstract	Transcription Summary	that the leader had been able to control	Interview 1	28					Addie
Orientation	Transcription Summary	and once he was gone,	Interview 1	29	leadership gone?				Addie
Orientation	Transcription Summary	there were a lot of personal agendas that came to the forefront	Interview 1	30		personal agendas	conflict	Parental/NonParental	Addie
Complicating Action	Transcription Summary	that created friction between the volunteers	Interview 1	31					Addie
Evaluation	Transcription Summary	I think the group, as a whole, took a step back	Interview 1	32	took a step back				Addie
Evaluation	Transcription Summary	several steps back	Interview 1	33					Addie
CODA	Transcription Summary	and created an environment that would be tough to recover	Interview 1	34					Addie

**Figure 6 - Transcript Segment and Coding #2**

Labovian Mode	Type	Transcript	Interview	Order	Cycling 1 Codin	Cycling 2 Codin	Subsuming	Theme	Participant
	Interview Question	do, over the last 24-25 years volunteering, when have you been most happy	Interview 2	150					Leia
Orientation	Transcription Summary	umm, probably when my boys got told enough	Interview 2	151	Children				Leia
Orientation	Transcription Summary	they have been dragged around for so long	Interview 2	152					Leia
Orientation	Transcription Summary	even when they were little kids, they were up here	Interview 2	153					Leia
Evaluation	Transcription Summary	but to see them actually participate, I think that was when I was the happiest	Interview 2	154	Joy		new motivating factor?	Parental/Nonparental	Leia
	Interview Question	how helpful about meeting with the kids to drink coffee or eat tea							

**Figure 7 - Filtered Data Codes**

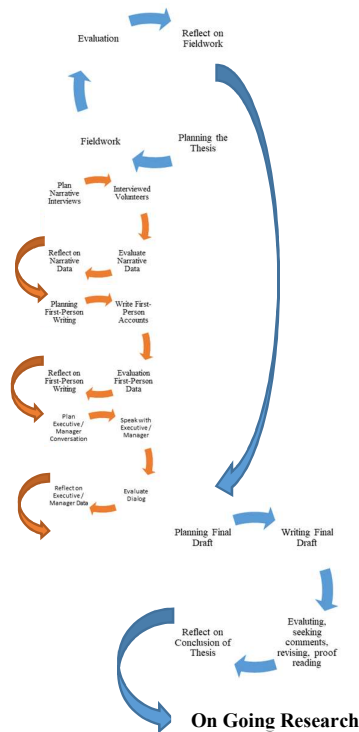
- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Asking What is Worthwhile</b>         | <b>Floundering</b>                             |
| <b>Brewing Under the Surface</b>         | <b>Implementing Poorly</b>                     |
| <b>Burning Out</b>                       | <b>Integrating Students and Volunteers</b>     |
| <b>Continuing Because of Obligations</b> | <b>Interacting</b>                             |
| <b>Energizing</b>                        | <b>Lacking a 'Coming Together'</b>             |
| <b>Feeling Confused and Lost</b>         | <b>Lacking a Place</b>                         |
| <b>Appointing Self</b>                   | <b>Lacking Communication</b>                   |
| <b>Being Blindsided</b>                  | <b>Lacking Direction</b>                       |
| <b>Connecting</b>                        | <b>Lacking Structure</b>                       |
| <b>Declining Format</b>                  | <b>Mentoring</b>                               |
| <b>Defining Roles</b>                    | <b>Needing Community</b>                       |
| <b>Exiting</b>                           | <b>Needing More Volunteers to be Recruited</b> |
| <b>Feeling a Lack of Support</b>         | <b>Motivating Factors (New or Old)</b>         |
| <b>Feeling Needed, Wanted, and Loved</b> | <b>Segregating</b>                             |
| <b>Feeling Unheard</b>                   | <b>Struggling With Who Had Power</b>           |



## APPENDIX 4: Action Research Cycles

This appendix expands the action research cycle discussion in chapter three, specifically section 3.3 *Actionable Knowledge* and section 3.5 *The Impact of the Research Design on Action Research and the Action Research Cycle*. The intention is to: (1) show how I initially envisioned for the action research cycles to look (2) show how the action research cycles most closely looked in practice. The primary reasons that this expansion is placed in the appendix rather than chapter three is that I believe these figures could dilute my emphasis on Marshall's (2016) Dynamic Model of Action Research and how action and inquiry were interwoven (Torbert, 2006) into this thesis. For example, figure 5 reflects how I initially envisioned the linear progression and influence of the action research cycles.

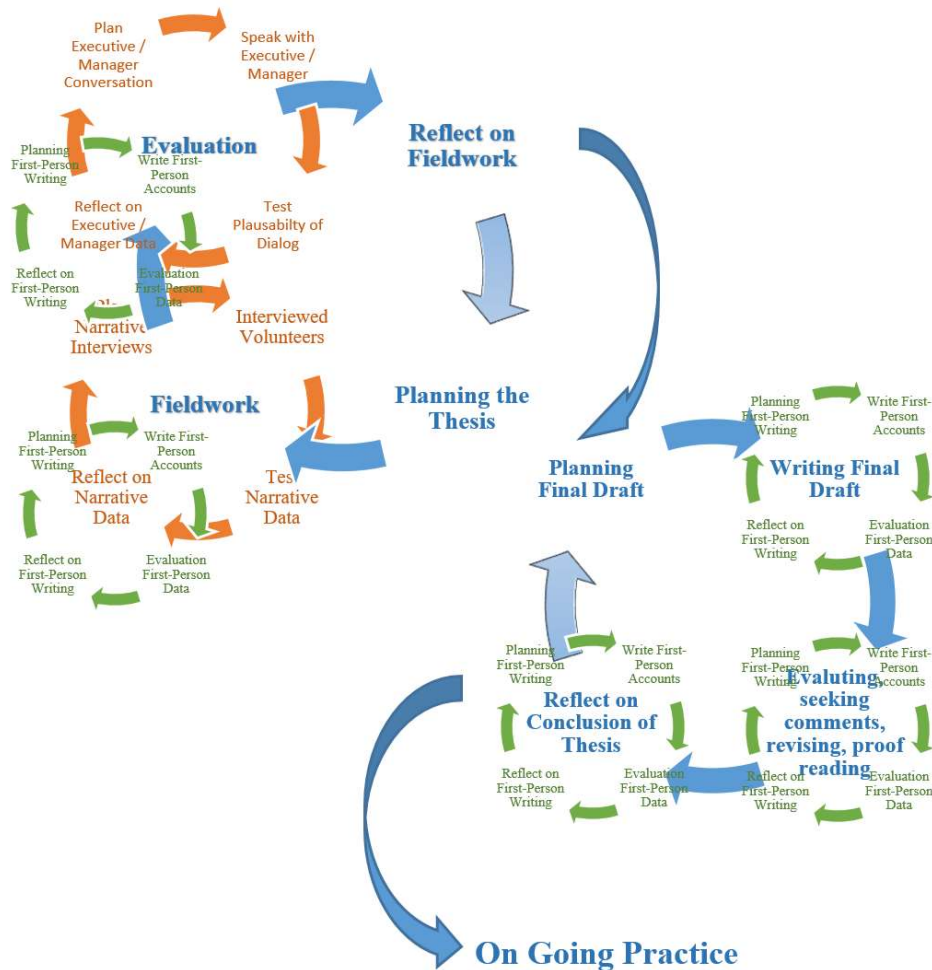
**Figure 8 - Envisioned Action Research Cycle**



*Implemented from 'Action research within organization and university thesis writing'  
(Zuber-Skerritt and Perry, 2002, p. 177)*

However, as I began viewing action research as an orientation of inquiry (Reason and McArdle, 2004), integrating different theories to create my own living theory (Creswell, 2007), and questioned “*in what why is ‘this’ inquiry*” (Marshall, 2016), the action research cycles looked more like Figure 6. All of drivers were discussed in detail in chapter three. As a result, chapter four presents the *first cycle of inquiry*. See the orange cycle around fieldwork in Figure 6. Chapter five, the *second cycle of inquiry*, presents many of the green cycles in Figure 6 that occurred within the orange cycles. Chapter six, the *third cycle of inquiry*, presents the second orange cycle around the evaluation. As highlighted by Coghlan (2019), like a clock, there were cycles occurring within cycles.

**Figure 9 - Actual Thesis Action Research Cycles**



*Integrated from ‘Doing Action Research in your Own Organization’ (Coghlan, p. 11-12) & ‘Action research within organization and university thesis writing’ (Zuber-Skerritt and Perry, 2002, p. 177)*

## APPENDIX 5: Research Thesis Timeline

The goal of this appendix is to provide the fieldwork timeline. While the details of the research are outlined in empirical chapters, the storytelling nature of *narrative inquiry* and *first-person writing* may blur events. Figure 10 aims to clarify any ambiguity.

**Figure 10 - Fieldwork Timeline**

