Building a grounded theory of volunteer engagement in English associational golf clubs

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PhD 2021

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements

of Manchester Metropolitan University

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Business & Law

Manchester Metropolitan University

2021

Abstract

Voluntary sports clubs rely on committed volunteers for organisational governance and to run sporting activities. However, clubs sometimes struggle to recruit and retain volunteers. Whilst affective organisational commitment encourages and sustains volunteering, the way it develops among sports club volunteers is not well understood. This study explores how volunteers' club commitment is shaped by their organisational experiences.

This study adopts a constructivist grounded theory methodology and investigates the case of volunteers in English associational golf clubs. The research gathered rich empirical data through observation and document analysis in four associational golf clubs and semi-structured interviews with 28 golf club volunteers. Data were analysed using grounded theory coding techniques to construct an abstract rendering of volunteers' experiences and their feelings towards their golf club.

This thesis makes three main contributions to knowledge. Firstly, it constructs *club socialisation* as a new concept for understanding how club members become volunteers. Club socialisation involves a process whereby individuals transition from new members into established members and then into volunteers. Secondly, this thesis constructs *volunteer-member discussions* as a new concept to represent a form of informal democracy within voluntary sports clubs. Where discussions are constructive and deliberative, they create a supportive environment for volunteering. Thirdly, this thesis proposes the concept of *affective club commitment* for sports club volunteers, which builds in layers over time and principally comprises a sense of belonging to other members, a feeling of involvement from voluntary efforts made and pride in the organisation as a whole. Research findings illustrate how club socialisation and volunteer-member discussions shape its development.

Finally, this thesis uses the constructed grounded theory as a framework to identify practical actions that associational golf clubs can take to develop affective club commitment among their volunteers.

Acknowledgements

A PhD degree is a substantial undertaking and no thesis is completed without a great deal of support along the way. I would therefore like to thank and acknowledge those organisations and people that have helped me.

I would first like to acknowledge the support I have received from England Golf. I am especially grateful to Matt Bloor, England Golf's Volunteer Manager, whose practical support and enduring enthusiasm for the research has been invaluable to me.

I have enjoyed researching golf clubs and their volunteers and have met many great people along the way. I am indebted to those that took part in the research. Without their willingness to share experiences, thoughts and feelings this thesis could never have been written.

I would like to thank my research supervisory team for their support and advice. I am particularly grateful to Dr Chris Mackintosh for inspiring this research and providing support throughout; Professor Cathy Urquhart for her expert guidance and commitment to my personal development; and Dr Leah Gillooly for being such a dependable reviewer of my work.

I would also like to acknowledge the support received from colleagues in the Voluntary Sector Studies Network and the UK Sports Volunteering Research Network. Finding other academics and practitioners with shared research interests and experiences has been a vital part of my PhD journey.

Finally, I would like to thank my partner, Rebecca. Her patience with me throughout the last 3 years has been immense. While my PhD journey has generally been enjoyable, on those occasions when I needed a lift, she helped me recover perspective and move forward again. I am fortunate to have her loving support.

Christopher Mills

January 2021

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1   Introduction

1.1   Chapter overview

The purpose of this introductory chapter is to set out the research problem for this thesis, explain why it matters and outline the research approach taken. The chapter starts by introducing the subject of the research, which is volunteering in voluntary sports clubs. The chapter then moves on to introduce the substantive case for this research, which is English associational golf clubs and their volunteers. Further to introducing these contexts and highlighting the importance of the affective organisational commitment of volunteers, the chapter lays out the research problem to be addressed by this thesis. A brief commentary on the author's reasons for choosing the topic is also provided. The chapter draws to a close by articulating how this research intends to make a contribution to knowledge. Finally, there is a short section outlining the structure of the thesis and signposting readers to the content of each subsequent chapter.

1.2   Volunteering issues in voluntary sports club

Volunteering is a complex phenomenon that spans a wide variety of activities, organisations and sectors (Hustinx et al., 2010). Among these, sport and recreation represent a significant context for volunteering in the western world (Salamon and Anheier, 1996; Smith et al., 2017). For example, in the United Kingdom, sport involves more volunteers in formal organisations than any other type of activity (Lindsey and Mohan, 2018). Sport England (2020) estimate that 6.2 million adults, equivalent to 14% of the population, volunteer to support sport and physical activity in England. Although this number is based on a broad definition of volunteering, it nonetheless highlights how volunteering in sport is a feature of many people's lives.

Sports clubs provide the main context for volunteering in the United Kingdom (Reid and Findlay-King, 2018) and volunteers play an important role in the successful operation of these organisations. In England, it has been estimated that there are around 74,000 sports clubs affiliated to national governing bodies (Shibli and Barrett, 2017). Without volunteers, many of these sports clubs would not survive. As democratic and non-profit organisations set up to satisfy members' shared interest in a sport, voluntary sports clubs rely on volunteers to perform governance roles and operational activities (Cuskelly et al., 2006; Nagel et al., 2015; Nichols, 2017). The importance of volunteers in sports clubs is reflected in government policy and strategy, which recognises the role that volunteers play in delivering the benefits of sport and physical activity to society (HM Government, 2015; Sport England, 2016b, 2017). Indeed, Sport England's strategy for 2016-21 noted that: 'Volunteers play a special role in sport. Without them grassroots sport would grind to a halt' (Sport England, 2016b: 22). Given the importance of volunteering, it has become an essential and popular theme in sports research. There is now a large body of research investigating volunteers in sport, which is reflected in several literature reviews on the subject (Lockstone-Binney et al., 2010; Nichols, 2017; Wicker, 2017).

While voluntary sports clubs have been a feature of society since the late nineteenth century (Hill, 2002; Nagel et al., 2015; Snape, 2018), there are concerns that long-term societal changes are gradually eroding their sustainability. In particular, there is concern that traditional voluntary sports clubs, like other grassroots voluntary associations, are at risk of becoming obsolete in the face of declining civic participation and growing individualism (Putnam, 2000; Pattie et al., 2004). To sustain themselves, membership organisations must convince sufficient numbers from among the membership to volunteer (Musick and Wilson, 2008). If too many members adopt a free-rider position (Olson, 1965) and engage in 'cheque-book participation' (Pattie et al., 2004: 272), only consuming club services and not contributing as volunteers, then clubs may become unviable.

It remains a matter of debate whether claims about declining participation are well-founded. There are two issues to consider: volunteering rates and changing patterns of volunteering. With regards the first issue, volunteering rates have not necessarily fallen. For example, in the UK, volunteering rates have been tracked over the past two decades by the government's Citizenship Survey and then the Community Life Survey. While differences in survey methods may affect the consistent calculation of participation rates over time, it nonetheless seems that rates of volunteering have not changed significantly since the 1980s (Lindsey and Mohan, 2018).

That said, the way many people engage in voluntary action is changing. Younger generations tend to prefer more episodic and informal volunteering (Rochester et al., 2010; Wilson, 2012). Analysis of longitudinal data from the British Household Panel Study suggests that birth cohorts post-1955 are less likely to be members of associations than their predecessors (McCulloch, 2014). There also appears to be a growing reliance on a 'civic core' to sustain formal voluntary organisations (Reed and Selbee, 2001). In England, this civic core, which tends to be middle-class, middle-aged and lives in the most prosperous areas, comprises around 30% of the population yet accounts for over 80% of the volunteering and charitable giving (Mohan and Bulloch, 2012). Thus, it seems that while overall volunteering rates may not be declining, younger people are not getting involved in the same way as previous generations.

It is not possible to analyse the same multi-decade trends in sports volunteering because of a lack of long-term datasets. Nevertheless, current day voluntary sports clubs face significant challenges in finding and keeping volunteers. In the context of the macro societal trends described above, voluntary sports clubs must convince enough members to volunteer so that club activities can be sustained. However, finding and keeping volunteers represent significant challenges. Indeed, the recruitment, management and retention of volunteers are frequently cited as some of the biggest problems facing voluntary sports clubs (Cuskelly, 2004; Nichols et al 2005; Cuskelly et al., 2006; MacPhail and

Kirk, 2006; Taylor et al., 2009; Østerlund, 2013; Wicker et al., 2014). The struggle to recruit and retain volunteers often results in ever greater pressures being placed on a core group of committed volunteers (Nichols, 2005).

Members' loyalty and commitment to their sports club are widely cited as important factors in encouraging and sustaining voluntary action (Cuskelly et al., 1998; Cuskelly and Boag, 2001; Engelberg et al., 2012, 2014; Ringuet-Riot et al., 2014; Taylor et al., 2015). Developing a better understanding of how organisational commitments forms, and how it is damaged, offers potentially useful insights into sustaining volunteerism inside sports clubs. As shall be argued in this thesis, there is scope for improving our knowledge about how the situational conditions of voluntary sports clubs influence the development of affective organisational commitment. In particular, this thesis shall argue that social interactions among members and volunteers provide essential foundations for the development of affective organisational commitment in the setting of voluntary sports clubs. With improved knowledge of how commitment forms, voluntary sports clubs should be better placed to manage organisational conditions to encourage and sustain volunteering among their members.

1.3   The substantive case of volunteering in English golf clubs

The concerns and challenges noted above are evident in English associational golf clubs, which form the substantive case for this thesis. Associational golf clubs represent a long-time component of the voluntary sports club landscape. Ever since the first associational golf clubs formed in the nineteenth century, golfers have been governing, managing and helping out in their clubs in an unpaid capacity (Holt, 1990; Vamplew, 2016). Although there was growth during the twentieth century in municipal and proprietary golf courses (Lowerson, 1989), associational golf clubs still account for over half of the 2,000 golfing establishments in England (England Golf, 2014).

Precise calculations of the number of volunteers in English associational golf clubs are not available, although the number is undoubtedly significant. In England, a national survey estimated that 148,900 people volunteer in golf each year (Sport England, 2015). This survey measured all forms of volunteering in golf and includes volunteers at professional and amateur golf tournaments and at proprietary and municipal golf courses. Therefore, while the figure highlights the overall significance of volunteering in golf, it does not give us a figure for the number of volunteers in associational golf clubs. Survey data collected in neighbouring Wales in 2003 found that 10.7% of golf club members volunteered at their clubs (Nichols and Shepherd, 2006). It is reasonable to suppose that a similar ratio may apply in England. If so, assuming an average of 484 members per club (England Golf, 2018a) and just over 1,000 associational golf clubs, this would suggest a total of around 52,000 volunteers in English associational golf clubs. This figure is similar to calculations made by England Golf, the sport's governing body in England. They estimate that there are approximately 40,000-44,000 golf club volunteers in English golf clubs (England Golf, 2017b, 2018b). This approximation is derived from biennial surveys of golf clubs, which suggest there are around 23 volunteers per golf club (England Golf, 2018a). While the survey may undercount the number of volunteers because informal and episodic volunteers were probably under-reported by golf clubs, it includes volunteers at proprietary and municipal courses. Therefore, while it remains difficult to get a precise number for the total number of volunteers in English associational golf clubs, it seems likely to be around 40,000 to 50,000.

Volunteers fulfil a wide variety of roles within associational golf clubs and are considered critical to the future health of the sport (England Golf, 2018b). Volunteers perform important governance roles, sitting on the boards and management committees of their golf club. In some clubs, especially those with limited resources and less capacity to employ staff, volunteers also get involved in day-to-day management activities. Furthermore, volunteers organise competitive golf through their men's, ladies, and seniors playing sections. Volunteers also often manage and support junior golf within their clubs.

Altogether, this means that volunteers play a vital role in running successful golf clubs. It is, therefore, essential that golf clubs continue to recruit and retain volunteers.

There are, however, concerns that golf clubs are finding it increasingly difficult to engage golfers. A trend towards 'pay and play' (Sports Marketing Surveys, 2014) and declining club membership (England Golf, 2018a), especially among younger adult golfers, risks cutting off the supply of members from which volunteers are drawn. England Golf's Volunteer Plan for 2018-2021 notes the challenges of recruiting younger adult volunteers and a lack of diversity among golf club volunteers, and how 'politics, club structures and an unwillingness to change' act as a potential deterrent to volunteering (England Golf, 2018b: 2). While most clubs are still able to find enough volunteers, the long-term sustainability of golf club volunteering needs to be addressed.

Golf club volunteering matters because golf is a major sport, both in England and globally. In Europe, where associational clubs are most common, the size of the golf industry has been estimated as €13.5billion (Sports Marketing Surveys, 2013). The value of the English golf market has been estimated as £3.2billion (Sports Marketing Surveys, 2014). Indeed, England is Europe's largest golfing nation with an estimated 1 million people regularly playing the sport (Sport England, 2019), making golf England's fifth largest competitive sport (Sport England, 2016a). Golf also generates significant social, physical and mental health benefits (Murray et al., 2018). Given the levels of golf participation and its associated economic, social and health value, and the vital role played by volunteers in associational golf clubs, it is surprising that golf club volunteers have not, until now, received scholarly attention. As such, volunteers in English associational golf clubs represents a significant new case for studying how organisational commitment develops among sports club volunteers.

1.4 The research problem

The purpose of this study is to consider the experience of volunteers within voluntary sports clubs and to understand how this experience influences both the nature and extent of their organisational commitment. The study is particularly concerned to understand how organisational conditions affect how volunteers feel about their club. The main research question explored by this study is: **How do volunteers' experiences within voluntary sports clubs shape their commitment to the organisation?**

The nature of the research question is exploratory. It created space for the research to identify the organisational experiences that have the most meaning to volunteers. By framing the research in this way, it became possible to consider the interpersonal interactions between volunteers and other club members and how the social context of a voluntary sports club influences how volunteers feel about their club. In this respect, this study adopts a 'sociological social-psychology' perspective (Kalkhoff, 2007: 929), whereby the research focusses on the relationship between society and the individual and how social context affects the thoughts and feelings of the individual. On the basis that group life provides the setting for individual experience and exerts a decisive influence on that experience, the research needed to be grounded in the empirical life under study (Blumer, 1969).

The research problem was addressed by investigating volunteers in English associational golf clubs. In focussing on the substantive case of golf club volunteers, this study aims to generate practical knowledge for golf's governing bodies and associational golf clubs. Thus, research findings are intended to help golf clubs understand and support their volunteers. Section 9.4, therefore, provides extensive coverage of practical recommendations.

1.5   The research approach

The research question encourages us to understand the experience of golf club volunteers from their perspective. The consequent requirement to understand what is meaningful to volunteers lends itself to an interpretive approach. As described in chapter 3, this study adopts a constructivist philosophical position and utilises qualitative research to address the research problem. As such, the study seeks to understand the meanings constructed by golf club volunteers as they are active in their golf club.

Given the exploratory nature of the study, and since golf club volunteers represent a new substantive case for research, the constructivist grounded theory method (Charmaz, 2014) was used to conduct the research. As documented in section 3, the study used the full scope of the grounded theory method, including data collection, data analysis and theory building strategies. By using the grounded theory method in this way, it has been possible to systematically and rigorously construct theory that is grounded in the views and experiences of golf club volunteers.

1.6   The researcher

Qualitative research is shaped by the people that undertake it. Since researchers do not passively collect and analyse data (Charmaz, 2014), it is important to recognise that researchers influence the research process. While section 3.11 provides a fuller account of reflexivity, it is helpful to briefly illuminate here the experience, knowledge and intentions of the researcher.

The author of this thesis brings with him a range of biographical experience. Having studied history as an undergraduate, he started working life as a financial auditor. After qualifying as a chartered accountant, he went on to work in financial management roles with the voluntary sector. Social policy issues proved more interesting than financial accounts, and so he undertook a Masters degree in Voluntary and Community Sector Studies in 2010-11. The author went

on to assume leadership roles with two voluntary organisations, both having connections with sport. It was during these two roles that the researcher became increasingly interested in the part played by volunteers in the governance and delivery of sport, especially at a grassroots level.

Throughout the researcher's adolescent and early adult life, he had played football, cricket and tennis at voluntary sports clubs. The internal workings of these clubs have always proved fascinating, especially the way that members interact with one another and social bonds form. Familiarity with sports clubs, therefore, underpinned this research. That said, the researcher was new to the world of golf. This study, therefore, provided an opportunity to explore a new social world and cast a fresh perspective on golf clubs and the way volunteers experience them. A fuller discussion of this 'outsider' perspective is offered in section 3.11 on reflexive practice.

1.7   Contributions to knowledge

This thesis shall argue that knowledge of sports club volunteers should be grounded in an understanding of the organisational context. In particular, it is argued that the social and democratic nature of voluntary sports clubs shapes the experiences of members and volunteers. Moreover, social interactions, especially those with fellow members, have a significant influence on how volunteers feel about their club. The research finds that social relationships can generate a sense of belonging, which forms the basis of emotional attachment. These feelings towards the club are further enhanced by making voluntary contributions. The research findings show, however, that not all social interactions are positive and that the formation and durability of affective club commitment are rarely forgone conclusions. A theoretical model that synthesises these findings is presented in diagrammatic form in Figure 15 on page 247.

The thesis makes the following novel contributions to knowledge:

- This study establishes ***club socialisation*** as a distinctive form of organisational socialisation for volunteers in voluntary sports clubs. It shows how much of the club socialisation of sports club volunteers occurs during membership, thereby establishing club socialisation as an important antecedent to volunteering. Club socialisation plays an essential role in the formation of affective club commitment.

- This study introduces ***volunteer-member discussions*** as a form of informal democracy within democratic membership-based voluntary organisations. It proposes a framework for defining volunteer-member discussions. The study shows how the concept is useful for understanding the volunteer experience and as an influence on the development of affective club commitment.

- This study constructs ***affective club commitment*** as a form of affective organisational commitment that is felt by volunteers in the context of voluntary sports clubs. The concept is distinctive because it allows for the layering and integration of multiple feelings towards multiple intra-organisational targets, comprising a sense of belonging to other members, a feeling of involvement to voluntary efforts made and pride in the organisation as a whole.

This study also draws on the theory constructed from the research to identify actions that golf clubs can take to have an impact on the development of affective club commitment among their volunteers.

A more detailed list of the contributions to knowledge is detailed in section 9.3 of chapter 9 at the end of this thesis.

1.8 Thesis structure

Further to this first chapter introducing the research context, research problem and intended contribution to knowledge, chapter 2 provides an overview of the literature on volunteering in sports clubs. It starts with a critical overview of what constitutes a 'voluntary sports club' and 'volunteering'. The chapter then goes on to explore what literature has to say about how members become volunteers, the volunteer experience and the nature of organisational commitment.

Chapter 3 covers the methodology of this PhD study. It outlines the research approach and the reasons why it was taken. In particular, the chapter discusses the merits of constructivist grounded theory method (Charmaz, 2014) and its application in the collection and analysis of data. It also covers reflexive practice, the evaluation of methodological rigour in qualitative research and ethical considerations.

Chapter 4 introduces the context for this study, which is volunteers in English associational golf clubs. Firstly, it reviews practitioner and academic literature to build up a picture of where associational golf clubs fit within the golf industry. Secondly, it explores what is known about associational golf clubs. Finally, the chapter uses information collected from field research to describe the four golf club cases included in this study.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 present the findings of the three main study themes. The themes cover club socialisation, volunteer-member discussions and affective club commitment. For each theme, results are presented using multiple illustrations from the data.

Chapter 8 discusses the data analysis for each of the three themes and considers how they relate to extant literature. The chapter also discusses how the three themes relate to one another.

Chapter 9 presents the conclusions of this research. Firstly, the chapter provides a summary of the main conclusions and answers the research question. Secondly, it identifies the theoretical contributions made to academic knowledge. Thirdly, it highlights implications for practitioners, including specific recommendations for golf clubs and England Golf. Finally, the chapter considers reflections on this study and opportunities for further research.

2   Literature Review

2.1   Introduction to the literature review

This literature review aims to examine what is known about the nature of organisational commitment among volunteers in voluntary sports club and how it develops. The chapter starts by critically reviewing definitions of 'voluntary sports clubs' in section 2.2 and 'volunteering' in section 2.3, and selecting those most appropriate for this study. Section 2.4 then introduces the volunteer process model (Omoto and Snyder, 1995; Snyder and Omoto, 2008) as a theoretical framework to structure the review of literature. The chapter goes on to critically review what the literature says about the research problem, including: how members become volunteers; the experience of volunteers; and, the nature of the organisational commitment that develops among volunteers. Section 2.5 looks at how members become volunteers within voluntary sports clubs and argues that literature has not paid enough attention to the influence of social context. Section 2.6 covers the volunteering experience and argues that more attention should be paid to how the distinctive features of voluntary sports clubs affect volunteers. Section 2.7 reviews how concepts of organisational commitment have been imported from employment literature and argues there is scope to develop forms of organisational commitment that are more sympathetic to the voluntary sports club context. The review concludes in section 2.8 by summarising significant gaps in the literature on

volunteering in voluntary sports club and the avenues of inquiry to be pursued in this thesis.

The literature review presented below is in the narrative style. The narrative style is commonly used by interpretivist researchers, especially when adopting an inductive approach, because theory tends to be the outcome of the study rather than the basis for it (Bryman, 2008). Interpretivist researchers are more likely than deductive researchers to alter their view of theory as a consequence of data collection and analysis. Indeed, since this is a grounded theory study, the literature review was initially prepared as a non-committal review and subsequently updated to include relevant literature as determined by the developing grounded theory (Urquhart, 2013).

The initial non-committal literature review began with a database search for relevant literature. Although database searches are commonly associated with systematic literature reviews, it is increasingly common for narrative reviews to incorporate some of the practices associated with systematic literature reviews (Bryman, 2008). In particular, the use of database searches at the start of a literature review is helpful because it provides an initial foundation to the literature search. Using Web of Science, a database of over 12,000 peer-reviewed journals and conference proceedings, a search was made of sports-related social science journals to find articles that considered volunteers in some way. The inquiry involved searching for the word 'volunteer'. Appropriate search techniques were applied to pick up variations on this word, including words sharing the same stem, such as 'volunteering' and 'volunteerism'. The search was applied to the title, abstract and keywords fields of the database. The search was restricted to articles published since 1970. The journals included in the search were: Annals of Leisure Research; European Sport Management Quarterly; International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics; International Review for the Sociology of Sport; Journal of Leisure Research; Journal of Sport and Social Issues; Journal of Sport Management; Society and Leisure (Loisir &

Société); Leisure Sciences; Leisure Studies; Managing Sport and Leisure; Sociology of Sport Journal; Sport in Society; and, Sport Management Review.

The initial database search yielded 152 references. The titles and abstracts for each reference were then reviewed to determine whether the literature was relevant to the study of volunteering in voluntary sports clubs. A large proportion of articles were excluded from the initial non-committal review because they covered sports event volunteering or non-sport leisure volunteering. As such, 42 articles formed the foundational base for the initial non-committal literature review and were selected for reading.

Database search techniques are limited in their effectiveness in locating relevant literature (Greenhalgh and Peacock, 2005). As such, and in the spirit of a narrative review, search results were treated as a departure point. On reading journal articles, references to other potentially relevant publications were noted. Where publications were particularly relevant and useful, the researcher used Google Scholar to search for journal articles that subsequently cited them, with potentially relevant publications noted. The abstracts of noted publications were then checked and, where relevant, selected for in-depth review. Other search techniques were also used, including asking colleagues and browsing library shelves.

A second 'integrative' (Urquhart, 2013: 30) phase of the literature review was undertaken during and after the data analysis. In grounded theory studies, it is only during and after the data analysis stage that the relevance of literature can be fully determined (Charmaz, 2014). An integrative phase of the literature review allows the researcher to revisit, update, amend and extend the literature review as necessary. Crucially, the integrative phase allows the researcher to connect new theory constructed from data analysis with existing theories, which lays the foundation for discussing the theoretical implications of the research findings in chapter 8.

2.2   Defining voluntary sports clubs

In social science research, it is important to define the phenomena and the context in which it is studied. This section, therefore, considers the definition of voluntary sports clubs. Section 2.3 then considers the definition of volunteering.

The phenomenon of volunteering occurs in a diverse range of contexts (Bussell and Forbes, 2002) and the experiences of volunteers within each of them are likely to be very different. It is, therefore, important to be explicit about the conditions under which the phenomena of volunteering are studied because this situates understanding and knowledge. Being specific about organisational context places boundaries around research knowledge and helps to identify what literature is relevant.

The origins of voluntary sports club in Europe lie in the late nineteenth century as citizens began to exert their right to form associations (Nagel et al., 2015; Snape, 2018). It was from this base that voluntary sports club rose to prominence in the twentieth century. Underpinning this growth was the 'club principle' (Hill, 2002: 130), in which people shared an interest in a sport and came together to pursue that interest collectively. So tremendous was the growth in voluntary sports clubs that by the end of the twentieth century, sporting organisations represented a significant strand of voluntary organisations across the Western world. Indeed, in their comprehensive classification of voluntary organisations, Salamon and Anheier (1996) concluded that voluntary sports organisations deserved separate attention and warranted a distinct classification.

The growth in voluntary organisations during the twentieth century, sporting or otherwise, was far from uniform. There was considerable variation in the form and function of organisations within and across countries. As a consequence, there are now significant challenges in forging a standard definition of voluntary organisations (Salamon and Anheier, 1997). When forming definitions for

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voluntary organisations, it is important to recognise the 'breath-taking diversity' of the voluntary sector (Taylor and Kendall, 1996: 58). As such, conceptualisations of voluntary organisations must necessarily focus on the most essential features.

Although there are definitional challenges, it is nevertheless possible to form meaningful definitions and classifications by examining the nature of organisations and activities. Organisational types can be determined by an analysis of shared characteristics and distinctive features. In taking such an approach, Salamon and Anheier (1996) were able to identify some essential attributes of voluntary organisations, including constitutional formality, voluntary action, self-governing independence and non-profit distribution.

The essential characteristics of voluntary organisations identified by Salamon and Anheier are usually present in the definitions of voluntary sports clubs used by sports sector scholars (Cuskelly et al., 2006; Nagel et al., 2015; Nichols, 2017). However, sports scholars have tended to develop slightly different interpretations of the essential characteristics, thereby leading to variable definitions. Table 1 analyses three recent scholarly definitions of voluntary sports clubs and identifies shared definitional themes. The contested aspects of each definitional theme are then discussed after the table.

Table 1 – Shared themes in the definition of voluntary sports clubs

Shared definitional theme	Voluntary sports organisations (Cuskelly et al 2006)	Sports clubs as voluntary organisations (Nagel et al 2015)	Community sports associations (Nichols, 2017)
The organisational purpose is to satisfy members' shared interest in sport.	Aim to provide members with opportunities to participate in organised sport and physical activity.	Orientation towards the common interests of members, in the form of collectively organised sports activities.	Mainly serves the needs of members.

Democratic organisational constitution.	Formally constituted.	Democratic decision-making structure, with individual members given the right to vote in general meetings. Members influence club goals.	Unincorporated or incorporated as a company limited by guarantee, where members elect leaders.
Membership is entirely voluntary.	-	Voluntary membership, whereby the member chooses when they join and leave.	Open membership policy that allows anyone within reason to join.
Members act in a voluntary capacity.	Operated by volunteer management committees or boards.	Services mainly produced by the voluntary work of members.	Run by volunteers. Volunteering provides additional leisure opportunities for members.
Self-governing independence.	Independently governed.	Autonomously pursue their goals independently of others.	-
Non-profit: meaning no distribution of financial surpluses to members.	Non-profit, meaning they do not return profits to members.	Non-profit orientation, with financial surpluses reinvested to realise club goals rather than being distributed to members.	Not-for-profit, with no provision for payment to members during the life of the club or upon dissolution.

Table 1 omits two definitional characteristics suggested by some of the scholars. Firstly, Cuskelly et al. (2006) noted that most voluntary sports clubs are formally affiliated with sport governing bodies and included this in their definition. However, while affiliation is common among sports clubs, it is not necessary. Some sports clubs do not affiliate because they see no advantage in doing so (Nichols, 2017). Secondly, Nagel et al. (2015) propose solidarity as part of their definition of voluntary sports clubs. By solidarity, they specify that the provision of services to individual members is not directly linked to payment. They assert that solidarity involves the payment of fixed membership fees which contribute to the provision of benefits for all members. However, while solidarity may be a common feature among voluntary sports clubs, its inclusion as a definitional feature seems unduly restrictive. For example, the definition appears to exclude clubs where individual members purchase supplementary goods and services

from the club for personal consumption, such as personalised coaching, drinks from the bar or hiring out the club's facilities for a private party. Furthermore, it is not clear how focussing on financial transactions necessarily adds to the conceptualisation of voluntary clubs as a collective endeavour. The common purpose and democratic principles of sports clubs, as set out in organisational constitutions, adequately capture the essence of shared endeavour. Therefore, neither solidarity nor affiliation is considered essential to the definition of voluntary sports clubs.

As noted in Table 1, scholars generally agree that the purpose of voluntary sports clubs is to satisfy members' shared interest in a sport. It is this goal of serving and benefiting members that distinguishes membership organisations from many other voluntary organisations, where the aim is to benefit others (Rochester et al., 2010). In voluntary sports clubs, the impetus for individuals to pool resources, work together and self-organise is based around a shared enthusiasm for an activity and the need to meet it (Bishop and Hoggett, 1986). Thus, organisational goals are formed out of the shared interests of the members.

Scholars also agree that a formal constitution is necessary to meet the definition of a voluntary sports club. The requirement to be institutionalised allows for a range of legal forms, but rules out temporary and ad hoc gatherings of people with no organisational structure or identity (Salamon and Anheier, 1996). This requirement is crucial because it is principally through a constitution or set of rules that a voluntary organisation defines itself and allows the outside world to recognise and distinguish it (Billis, 1993). In defining voluntary sports clubs, a democratic structure is also considered essential (Nagel et al., 2015; Nichols, 2017). Democratic structures give members the right to vote in general meetings and to elect from among themselves members to govern the organisation. Thus, members collectively control decision-making within the organisation. While growth in professional and paid staff may sometimes alter internal structures and disguise the voluntary nature of sports clubs (Thibault et

al., 1991; Adams, 2011), this should not deflect from the underlying principle that democratic structures mean that members ultimately remain in control.

Voluntary membership is another well-established characteristic defining voluntary sports clubs. For membership-based voluntary organisations, Salamon and Anheier (1996) identified non-compulsory membership as a key defining feature, meaning that organisations should be excluded from the definition when membership is stipulated by law. Such an instance may occur when a professional body or trade association membership is a legal requirement. The extension of this voluntary membership principle by Nichols (2017) to include 'open membership' is, however, rejected as an essential requirement of the definition. Nichol's open membership principle came from Sport England's (2005) legal definition of community amateur sports clubs, which sought to establish tax breaks for clubs in return for providing access to sport for all sections of society. However, sports clubs are essentially about the pursuit of common goals and it seems reasonable that clubs should retain the right to rebuff prospective members or eject existing members if they violate the common interests of members. On this basis, the definition of voluntary sports clubs should not stipulate the requirement that anyone should be able to join.

Voluntary action is generally considered to be an essential characteristic of voluntary sports clubs (Salamon and Anheier, 1996; Cuskelly et al., 2006; Nagel et al., 2015; Nichols, 2017). This means that volunteers should play significant and meaningful roles within the organisation, which typically occurs in two ways. Firstly, voluntary sports clubs, by virtue of their democratic structures, engage members as volunteers in organisational governance. Secondly, members may get involved in other volunteer activities, such as coaching and organising competitions. While non-governance volunteering is common, they are not essential to defining a voluntary sports club. Voluntary sports clubs can function using paid staff to perform non-governance roles (Breuer et al., 2012). As such, even though non-governance volunteering is common to most voluntary sports clubs, volunteer involvement in governance is usually

sufficiently meaningful and significant to establish the voluntary characteristic of voluntary sports clubs.

Self-governing independence is a common characteristic used to define voluntary sports clubs (Cuskelly et al., 2006; Nagel et al., 2015; Nichols, 2017). Independence involves organisations controlling their activities and retaining a meaningful degree of autonomy. While independence would seem to be a natural consequence of a formal organisational structure, voluntary organisations are not immune to interference from government, sports governing bodies and other institutions. Funding and contractual arrangements can subvert accountabilities and subject sports clubs to the control of others (Horch, 1994; Nichols et al., 2005; Harris et al., 2009). Sufficient autonomy is, therefore, deemed necessary to meet the definition of a voluntary sports club status.

All definitions of voluntary sports clubs include a requirement that financial surpluses are not distributed to members (Cuskelly et al., 2006; Nagel et al., 2015; Nichols, 2017). While voluntary sports clubs may generate and accumulate financial surpluses, all of these should be ploughed back into meeting the stated purpose of the organisation (Salamon and Anheier, 1996). The non-profit distributing requirement is, therefore, considered an essential element of the definition of voluntary sports clubs.

Taken together, the six shared definitional characteristics identified in the first column of Table 1 provide a sound basis for distinguishing voluntary sports clubs. However, there remains the question of what term to use to best summarise these characteristics. Choosing the most appropriate vocabulary is important because terms signify meaning. Scholars have used multiple terms for their definitions, including voluntary sports organisation, voluntary sports club and community sports association. 'Sport' is used consistently among the definitional names, and its meaning is well understood. The term 'voluntary' is used in two of the definitions and seems necessary given the definitional

features of voluntary membership and voluntary action. However, the use of terms to convey the membership and formal organisational aspects are more varied. The term 'club' is preferred because it is typically understood to mean either an association dedicated to a particular activity or an organisation constituted to play matches in a specific sport. As such it appears to embrace notions of both 'community' (a group of people having a particular characteristic in common) and 'association' (a group of people organised for a joint purpose), thereby making these two terms redundant.

In conclusion, for the purposes of this study, the term 'voluntary sports club' is used. While recognising that definitional consensus is not easily achieved, voluntary sports clubs are nonetheless defined for the purposes of this study by the following characteristics:

- The organisational purpose is to satisfy members' common interest in a sport.
- The organisation has a democratic constitution.
- Membership of the organisation is entirely voluntary.
- Members act in a voluntary capacity within the organisation.
- The organisation retains self-governing independence.
- The organisation is run on a non-profit basis, meaning that financial surpluses are not distributed to members.

2.3 Defining volunteering

It is apparent from the discussion of voluntary sports clubs that volunteering by members is integral to their essence. Since volunteers are the focus of this study, a clear definition of volunteering is needed as it helps to distinguish who is a volunteer and who is not. Within voluntary sports clubs, this is especially important as there is a need to distinguish between membership and volunteering (Musick and Wilson, 2008). It is, therefore, necessary for us to be clear on what is meant by the term 'volunteer'.

The term 'volunteer' is commonly used in everyday language in most Western cultures and, on first appearance, might seem to have an unmistakable meaning. However, defining volunteering is conceptually challenging. The phenomenon has fuzzy boundaries and is not always easily differentiated from other concepts such as work or leisure (Stebbins, 2013). Within sport, the conceptualisation and cultural meaning of volunteering have been shown to differ across countries (Hallmann and Fairley, 2018), which emphasises its socially constructed nature. There are, therefore, significant challenges in agreeing a contextually relevant definition (Cnaan et al., 1996; Snyder and Omoto, 2008; Wilson, 2012).

Cnaan et al. (1996) provide a useful and widely accepted framework for defining volunteering. They reviewed a range of definitions of volunteering and identified four key common dimensions: free choice, remuneration, structure and intended beneficiaries. They argued that within each dimension there is a spectrum of features that distinguish volunteering between 'pure' and 'broadly defined' forms. The model was tested against public perception across nine different countries (Cnaan et al., 1996; Meijs et al., 2003), thereby confirming that the basic concepts applied across a range of contexts.

Since volunteering is viewed in Western cultures as an essentially altruistic activity, a net-cost element was also found to be an important feature of how people understood volunteering (Cnaan et al., 1996; Meijs et al., 2003). Thus, an individual is perceived to be more of a volunteer when the perceived net-cost of volunteering is higher. In the context of voluntary sports clubs, this presents some challenges because volunteers will themselves benefit from their contribution towards the provision of club goods and services. Therefore, while the public may perceive a net-cost requirement for defining a volunteer, it is debatable how well this translates into the voluntary sports club context.

Perhaps more important to defining a volunteer within voluntary sports clubs is the need to distinguish between being a member of a voluntary organisation and being a volunteer (Musick and Wilson, 2008). There is considerable overlap between voluntary organisation membership and volunteering. However, just because an individual is a member of a voluntary sports club does not mean that they are also a volunteer. A member may be active in the sense that they engage in association activities - such as participating in club events, attending the annual general meeting and reading club communications – but they are not necessarily involved in the production of goods and services. Members of associations that only consume the goods and services produced by other members, aside from their payment of membership fees, were called 'free-riders' by Olson (1965). While it is possible for some individuals to 'free-ride' on the efforts of others, it is also unrealistic to expect that everyone in a sports club should volunteer. That said, if enough members do not volunteer, then the sports club's survival may be jeopardised.

For the purposes of defining volunteering for this PhD, an approach is required that is consistent with the preferred framework for defining volunteers (Cnaan et al., 1996), respects the formal organisational context of voluntary sports clubs and is distinguishable from passive organisational membership. As such, for the purposes of this PhD, volunteering is defined as: any activity, freely undertaken, without expectation of remuneration, which takes place through a formally constituted group, club or other organisation, and aims to benefit other individuals or a community.

2.4 The volunteer process model

In this section, the volunteer process model developed by Omoto and Snyder is presented (Omoto and Snyder, 1995, 2002; Snyder and Omoto, 2008). The model, which is summarised in Table 2 below, is considered a useful framework for research on volunteering. Indeed, it provided the structure for an influential literature review on volunteerism (Wilson, 2012). In this study, the framework

was used for structuring the literature review across sections 2.5, 2.6 and 2.7, and for the theoretical integration of this study's grounded theory in section 8.5.2 of the discussion in chapter 8. Table 2 summarises the main features of the volunteer process model.

Table 2 – The volunteer process model (Snyder and Omoto, 2008)

Levels of Analysis	Stages of the Volunteer Process		
	Antecedents	**Experiences**	**Consequences**
Individual	Personality, motivation, life circumstances	Satisfaction, stigma, organizational integration	Knowledge and attitude change, health
Interpersonal/ social group	Group memberships, norms	Helping relationship, collective esteem	Composition of social network, relationship development
Agency / organisation	Recruitment strategies, training	Organisational culture, volunteer placement	Volunteer retention, work evaluation
Societal / cultural context	Ideology, service programs and institutions	Service provision, program development	Social capital, economic savings

The volunteer process model views volunteerism as a process that unfolds over time. There are three stages including the antecedents, experiences and consequences of volunteering. The three stages are sequential with each stage influencing the next. The model also breaks down volunteerism into various levels of analysis. These levels include the individual, interpersonal, organisational and societal. At the individual level, the model considers the personal characteristics, psychology and actions of individual volunteers. At the interpersonal level, the model focusses on volunteers' relationships. These include relationships with all the other people that they encounter when volunteering. At the organisation level, the model incorporates the organisational features that influence volunteering and the organisational outcomes that arise from involving volunteers. At the societal level, the model considers the linkages between volunteering and wider social structures and institutions.

The volunteer process model has strengths and limitations. The first limitation to note is that Omoto and Snyder (1995) initially developed the model during a study of volunteers involved in the delivery of HIV and AIDS service programs in

the United States. The model, therefore, has its foundations in healthcare and social welfare volunteering. The schematic models subsequently presented by the authors included illustrative examples that were relevant to healthcare and social welfare service delivery contexts (Omoto and Snyder, 2002; Snyder and Omoto, 2008). While the structure of the model, comprising the various stages and levels of analysis, is readily deployed in other volunteering situations, the illustrative examples that populate the cells in Table 2 may need adaptation for different contexts. Indeed, the illustrative examples in each cell of the table are not necessarily relevant to the voluntary sports club context. Therefore, whilst the framework is useful, relevant concepts are likely to be dependent on context.

There are also some ambiguities around the philosophical underpinnings of the volunteer process model. In their original article, Omoto and Snyder (1995) presented the model as a tool for predicting sustained volunteerism. There was an emphasis on why people volunteer and proposing generalisable relationships between a limited selection of individual antecedents, experiences and consequences of volunteering. However, the next iteration expanded the model to include different levels of analysis and seemed more aware of the complexity of the volunteering process (Omoto and Snyder, 2002). In the latest iteration of the model, the authors appear less inclined to make generalisable relationships between the antecedents, experiences and consequences of volunteering, preferring instead to offer a broader and more integrative model (Snyder and Omoto, 2008). As such, the volunteer process model now appears to be more of a framework to systematically organise research on volunteering. For the constructivist, these later modifications are considered a strength. There is now a better appreciation of how a broad range of contextual features shape antecedents and experiences, which in turn influence the consequences of volunteering. Nevertheless, given the models positivist roots, it is important to make clear that the volunteer process model is not being used in this study to make deterministic claims about volunteering.

A key strength of the most recent presentation of the volunteer process model (Snyder and Omoto, 2008) is that it provides a comprehensive framework for understanding volunteerism without sacrificing the complexity of volunteering. It is an integrative model that highlights how what happens at various stages and levels influence what happens at other stages and levels. Indeed, the model underscores the complexity of volunteering, with various stages and levels of analysis. As Table 2 indicates, there are 12 combinations of stages and levels of analysis, which can be populated by multiple features. Therefore, while Snyder and Omoto were psychologists and particularly interested in the individual level of analysis, the model can be used for sociological, political and economic analysis.

From a constructivist standpoint, the volunteer process model is useful because it enables us to view theory as narrative. The model concerns itself with how people volunteer, the context of volunteering and volunteering as social change (Hustinx et al., 2010). The framework is consistent with the development of theory that accounts for behaviour and change over time and is respectful of the particular conditions of each substantive context.

Since the volunteer process model provides a basic framework for understanding volunteering, it can be applied to a range of different contexts, including sports club volunteers. The model allows the particularities of each context to be explored. For sports club volunteers this is important because, as noted above in section 2.2, voluntary sports clubs have some distinctive features. Indeed, the model seems well suited to the voluntary sports club context because it includes the interpersonal level of analysis. Voluntary sports clubs are mutual organisations, where members come together to satisfy a shared interest (Nichols, 2017). They are social in nature. Members and volunteers interact and feel connected with one another (Nichols et al., 2012; Østerlund and Seippel, 2013; Darcy et al., 2014). The framework of the volunteer process model has the capacity to integrate these distinctive features.

At the same time, it is important to be alert to how the concepts that populate the cells of the volunteer process model may differ in the voluntary sports club context. Voluntary sports clubs are different from the healthcare and social welfare organisations that Snyder and Omoto (2008) studied. In voluntary sports clubs, volunteers primarily produce activities for fellow members, which is different from volunteering for organisations that provide help and support for external service users. As such, the interpersonal components that populate the model are likely to be different in the study of sports club volunteers. Furthermore, since volunteers are drawn from among a sports club's membership, it is possible that some interpersonal and organisational influences may be apparent at the antecedent stage, whereas in other contexts these influences are more confined to the experience stage. The relevance and positioning of concepts within the framework are addressed in this thesis.

While it is recognised that the societal and cultural context plays an important role in shaping volunteering, it has not been possible to address this level of analysis in this research. In the collection and analysis of data, this study has concentrated on what happens to volunteers within the organisational boundaries of golf clubs. This reflects a need to contain the scope of the study rather than any judgment on the importance of the societal level of analyses. For this reason, the remainder of this literature review does not cover the societal and cultural context of sports club volunteering.

Overall, the volunteer process model underscores the complexity involved in understanding volunteerism. It shows how efforts to initiate, support and sustain volunteering requires consideration of multiple influences. Using the volunteer process model as a broad theoretical framework brings cohesion to this study. Importantly, it facilitates the integration of concepts across the three stages of the volunteer process and supports analysis across the respective levels. Thus, towards the end of this thesis, during the discussion in section 8.5.2 of chapter 8, we shall return to consider what implications this study's findings have for the volunteer process model.

2.5 How members become volunteers

2.5.1 Introduction

To understand the development of commitment among volunteers in voluntary sports clubs, we must first consider how members become volunteers. As shall be described below, literature has identified individual, organisational and interpersonal factors that affect rates of volunteering. While this literature is useful in highlighting influential key factors, it shall be argued that literature has tended to ignore the temporal and socially interactive nature of voluntary sports clubs. For a more contextually sympathetic understanding of how sports club members become volunteers, we must pay attention to organisational experience and social interactions, and the meanings that members derive from these.

2.5.2 Individual characteristics

In attempting to explain sports club volunteering, literature has often investigated the influence of individual characteristics, including demographic, socio-economic and psychological factors. Research into the significance of such individual characteristics is considered below.

With regard to demographics, it is difficult to be clear about the impact of demographics on sports club volunteering. Studies using national surveys with large sample sizes have indicated that volunteering in sport is affected by age (Taylor et al., 2012), gender (Taylor et al., 2012; Hallmann, 2015), ethnicity (Taylor et al., 2012) and dependent children (Taylor et al., 2012; Hallmann, 2015). Similarly, data from Sport England's Active Lives survey, as presented below in Figures 1, 2, 3 and 4, also allude to different rates of sports volunteering by gender, age, ethnicity and disability (Sport England, 2020). However, these studies surveyed sports volunteering across a range of different settings, including volunteers in schools, charities and sports events, as well as voluntary sports clubs. The presence of other contexts in survey data places

limitations on applying the findings directly to sports club volunteers. This is important because voluntary sports clubs, which are characterised by mutual aid, self-production and self-consumption, provide a distinctive context (Harris et al., 2009). Patterns in who volunteers in voluntary sports clubs may be different from other contexts.

Figure 1 - Gender of sports volunteers in England (Sport England, 2020)
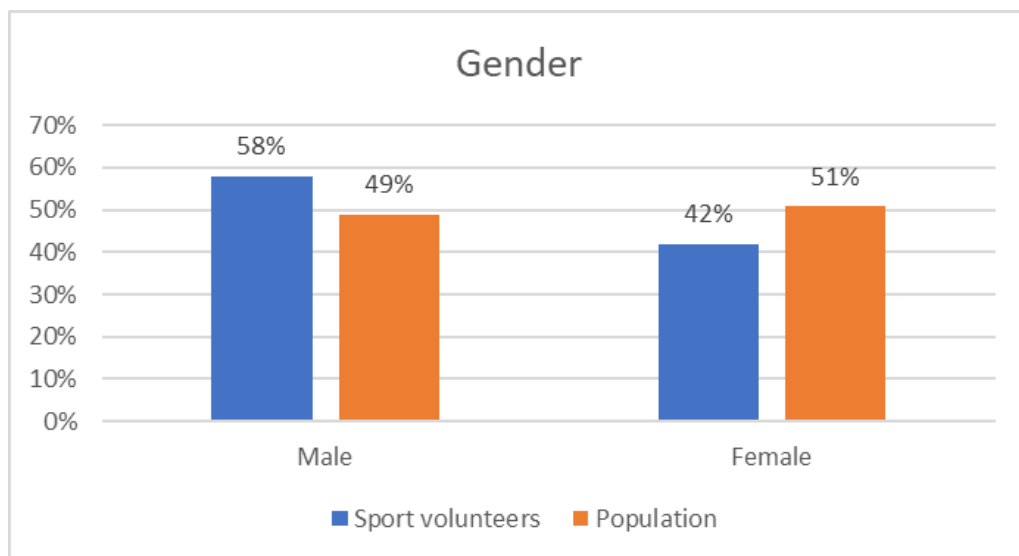
Figure 2 - Age of sports volunteers in England (Sport England, 2020)
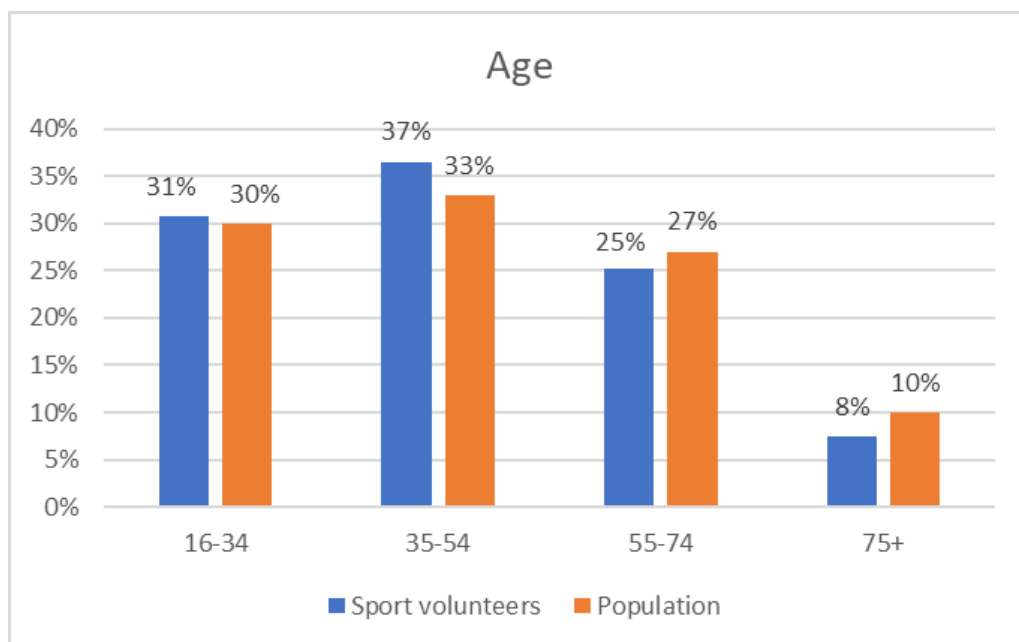
Figure 3 - Ethnicity of sports volunteers in England (Sport England, 2020)
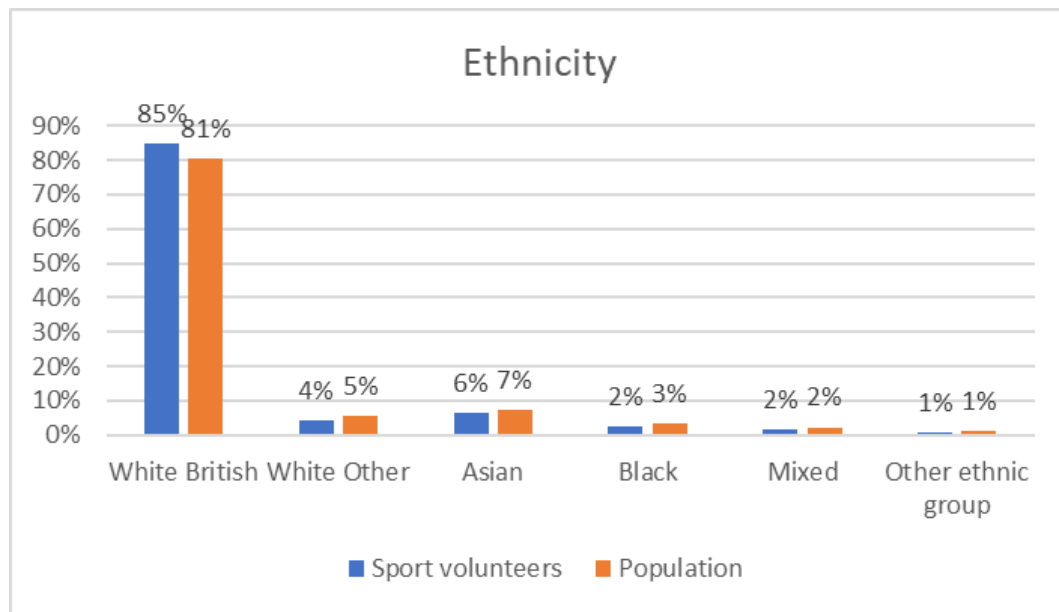
Figure 4 - Disability of sports volunteers in England (Sport England, 2020)
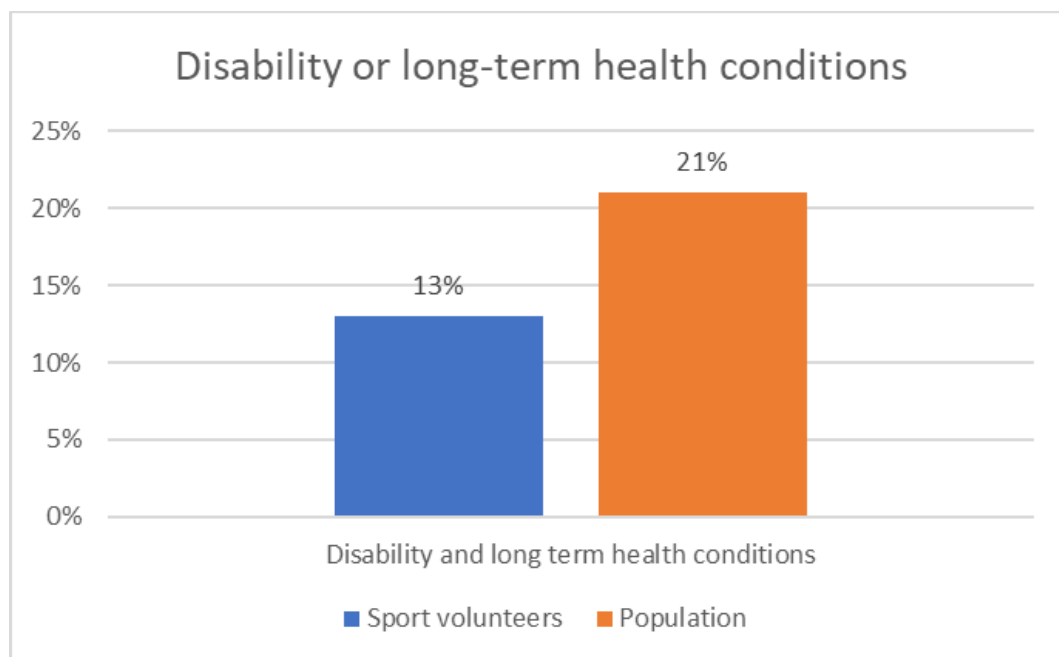
It is also uncertain whether demographic factors apply consistently across voluntary sports club contexts. For example, research into the determinants of volunteering in UK swimming clubs found the demographic influences of age and gender working in different ways to other sports club contexts (Burgham and Downward, 2005). Although this study was based on a small sample of 126

volunteers and non-volunteers at two randomly selected swimming clubs, it highlights the limitations of using demographic characteristics to make reliable predictions about who will volunteer across a range of voluntary sports club contexts appears limited.

With regard to socio-economic factors, there have been many studies investigating the links between the socio-economic characteristics of individuals and volunteering in sport. Whether people become volunteers has been found to correlate with: income (Taylor et al., 2012; Schlesinger and Nagel, 2013); employment status (Burgham and Downward, 2005); working hours (Burgham and Downward, 2005; Schlesinger and Nagel, 2013; Hallmann and Dickson, 2017); education (Taylor et al., 2012) and human capital (Hallmann, 2015). Data from Sport England's Active Lives survey, as presented below in Figure 5, also allude to different rates of sports volunteering by socio-economic status (Sport England, 2020). Taken together, these studies suggest that whether individuals volunteer is influenced, at least to some degree, by social structure. However, the analysis is once again limited by surveys combining all instances of sports volunteering and not separately distinguishing voluntary sports club volunteering. The socio-economic influences found across the studies also vary, which suggests the significance of factors is context specific. Furthermore, although the studies indicate that socio-economic factors influence who volunteers, it is not apparent from survey data what social processes produce these correlations.

Figure 5 - Socio-economic status of sports volunteers in England (Sport England, 2020)
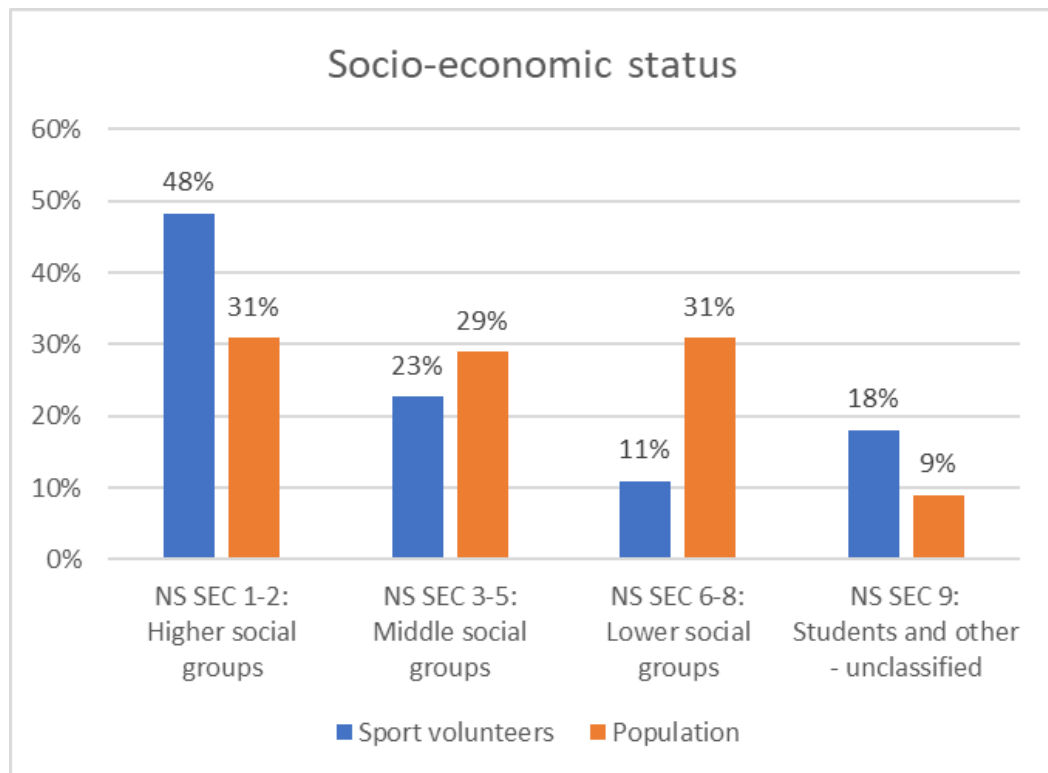
In the voluntary sector, influential bodies of research have sought to identify the psychological factors that explain volunteering, including personality types (Penner, 2002; Bekkers, 2005; Handy and Cnaan, 2007) and personal motivations (Omoto and Snyder, 1995; Clary et al., 1998; Clary and Snyder, 1999). Although sports sector researchers have also adopted psychological theories, they have mostly used them to investigate why people volunteer for sports events (Kim, 2018). Sports event volunteering tends to be episodic and short-term, which places a greater emphasis on personal psychological factors rather than social ones. With regard to sports club volunteering, a review of academic and practice-based literature on the motivations of sports volunteers concluded that: young people tended to volunteer for more instrumental reasons such as furthering their career; older people wanted to utilise their skills and experience; and, all volunteers were motivated by a passion and enthusiasm for their sport (Nichols et al., 2016). However, the sports club studies drawn upon in this review did not specifically address the relationship between motivation and whether members volunteer. Rather, they generated a

large and diverse range of motivational factors that appeared to be generally present among sports club volunteers without attending to whether these same characteristics are comparatively lacking among sports club members that don't volunteer. To this author's knowledge, there are no quantitative empirical studies published in academic journals that investigate how motivation and personality type affect whether members volunteer at their sports club.

Taken together, attempts to explain sports club volunteering by demographic, socio-economic and psychological factors have limitations. In particular, the studies tend to privilege individual factors over social aspects of community membership, thereby neglecting the socially embedded nature of volunteering (O'Toole and Grey, 2016). If one accepts that humans are reflective beings that act based on experience and the meaning they give to things (Blumer, 1969), then greater consideration of situational context is desirable. Therefore, we now turn to examine how members' experiences of voluntary sports clubs, including organisational features and interpersonal relations, affect whether they become volunteers.

2.5.3   Organisational influences

Since volunteering is commonly defined as taking place within an organisational context (Cnaan et al., 1996), this raises questions of how organisational factors influence volunteering. In the case of voluntary sports clubs, sporting participation and organisational membership typically precede volunteering (Burgham and Downward, 2005; Cuskelly and O'Brien, 2013; Hallmann, 2015). Members experience sports clubs before they volunteer. This is an important distinguishing feature of voluntary sports clubs which is not necessarily shared by other volunteering contexts. Consideration of organisational experience is therefore needed to understand how members become volunteers in voluntary sports clubs.

In reviewing the sports club volunteering literature, Schlesinger et al. (2013) and Wicker and Hallmann (2013) have both made convincing cases for considering

the impact of organisational factors on the decision to volunteer in sports clubs. In line with this, volunteering rates have been found to be higher in sports club with various characteristics, including: a rural geographical setting among Swiss sports clubs (Schlesinger and Nagel, 2013); a smaller number of members in New Zealand tennis clubs (Hallmann and Dickson, 2017); a strategic orientation among Swiss sports clubs (Schlesinger and Nagel, 2013); and, greater human resource, financial and structural organisational capacity among German football and athletics clubs (Swierzy et al., 2018). Østerlund (2013) also found that management characteristics, including a management style that facilitates member engagement, influence how easy it was to recruit volunteers from among the membership of Danish sports organisations. Furthermore, Swierzy et al.'s (2018) study of German football and athletics clubs suggested that organisational factors were more significant than individual characteristics at explaining why members volunteered. However, the quantitative studies noted above are based around particular national and sporting contexts and the patterns found may be influenced by their distinctive circumstances. These quantitative studies are also limited in their ability to uncover how organisational characteristics influence individual decisions to volunteer. Therefore, while organisational factors appear to influence how members become volunteers, the underlying social processes remain unclear.

Organisational recruitment strategy and practices would seem to offer a more promising explanation of sports club volunteering. The way that sports clubs recruit volunteers has a more direct influence on whether and how members become volunteers. Yet, this presupposes systematic organisational processes. Research into the volunteer recruitment activities of Swiss sports clubs found inconsistent and sometimes arbitrary practices (Schlesinger et al., 2015). Decision-making processes for recruiting volunteers were mostly characterised by a reactive rather than a systematic approach and determined by key individuals within the club. These findings are limited to Swiss sports clubs. They are, nevertheless, consistent with UK voluntary sector research that found people typically move into volunteer roles as a result of informal word of mouth

requests, which arise from existing social and participatory ties (Brodie et al., 2011). We may, therefore, be better off looking at more informal processes to understand how sports club members become volunteers.

2.5.4   Interpersonal and social group influences

There is a strong case for seeking a better understanding of relationships within voluntary sports clubs as a precursor to volunteering. Relationships appear to be important because, as suggested by an exploratory qualitative study of five sports clubs in an English town, sports clubs tend to recruit volunteers from among their members where bonding social ties exist (Nichols et al., 2012). Indeed, in quantitative research that sampled 1,435 members from 36 Swiss sports clubs, length of membership was found to correlate with whether individuals volunteer (Schlesinger and Nagel, 2013). Presumably, longer periods of membership provides more time for social relationships to develop. Further clues to understanding this correlation come from Cuskelly and O'Brien (2013). In a qualitative study involving semi-structured interviews with 12 longstanding players and volunteers from six different community sports organisations in Australia, they found that a desire to maintain relationships, identity and a sense of belonging encouraged ageing sports players to continue their involvement in a community sports organisation by volunteering. Similarly, Schlesinger and Nagel's (2013) quantitative survey work in Switzerland found that social and emotional commitment to their sports club was one of the strongest predictors of whether a member volunteers. From these studies, there is an emerging picture of how social interactions and the formation of social and emotional ties play an important role in stimulating volunteering. This suggests that prior social interactions within sports clubs frame the conditions for future voluntary action. However, quantitative studies, like some of those noted above, are not best placed to reveal how, over time, social interactions within voluntary sports club change the way people think and feel about their sports club. If we are to understand how social interactions stimulate members to volunteer, then qualitative research is needed to explore volunteers' pre-volunteering membership experience.

It is noteworthy that the socialisation of sports club members as a precursor to volunteering has not yet been explored. Literature has covered various aspects of socialisation in sport including aspects of young people's socialisation (MacPhail and Kirk, 2006), newcomer initiation rituals (Crow and Macintosh, 2009), person-organisation fit (Kim et al., 2007), social integration (Ulseth, 2004) and social exclusion (Lake, 2013). Studies have also investigated the link between group relations and sports participation, suggesting that sports participation is sustained by group participation (Burke et al., 2006), socialising with others (Wood and Danylchuk, 2011), social support (Casper et al., 2007) and the development of shared meanings (Wheaton, 2000). In the same way that interpersonal and group relations influence sporting participation, it seems likely that they also influence whether members become volunteer in sports clubs. As such, there is scope to research how volunteers were socialised as sports club members with a view to understanding how they become a volunteer.

Organisational socialisation is 'the process by which an individual acquires the social knowledge and skills necessary to assume an organisational role' (Maanen and Schein, 1979: 211). In most organisational socialisation models, socialisation has been conceptualised as occurring in phases, including pre-entry anticipatory socialisation, newcomer encounter, metamorphosis into an established organisational member and organisational exit (Kramer, 2010; Jablin, 2011). Within the voluntary sector, there are only a few studies of the organisational socialisation of volunteers. These qualitative studies cover a range of different contexts, including the socialisation of travellers aid volunteers at Washington airport in the USA (McComb, 1995), mountain rescue volunteers in the USA (Lois, 1999), volunteers providing night time outreach services to vulnerable young people in Israel (Haski-Leventhal and Bargal, 2008) and community choir volunteers in the USA (Kramer, 2011). These studies tend to show broadly the same socialisation stages as found in employment settings, although the complex features of some voluntary settings create some

variations to the essential stages. When considering the transferability of findings to sports clubs, Kramer's (2011) study of community choir volunteers is noteworthy because it suggests that general familiarity with the volunteer activity, often gained in other similar organisational settings, prepared individuals for their volunteer roles. Information sources also helped individuals consider and prepare for becoming a volunteer. These included family, education, peers, previous experience and the media. There was also a strong emphasis on social relations helping newcomers prepare for and settle into the voluntary organisation. These same themes could plausibly apply to members becoming volunteers in sports clubs.

The most influential volunteer socialisation study was performed within the context of an Israeli voluntary organisation that provided services to vulnerable young people, where volunteers entered the organisation as a volunteer (Haski-Leventhal and Bargal, 2008). The resultant Volunteer Stages and Transitions Model sets out five stages of a volunteers' socialisation including nominee, newcomer, emotional involvement, established volunteering and retiring. Transitions occur between each stage. The study shows how, over time, events, experiences and social interactions affect volunteers' knowledge, perceptions, attitudes and emotions. Although highly influential in the wider voluntary sector literature, the model appears to have doubtful applicability to sports clubs, where volunteers are likely to be socialised as members first. There is, therefore, scope to develop an organisational socialisation model that better fits the voluntary sports club context.

2.5.5   Summary

In summary, literature on the antecedents to volunteering in voluntary sports clubs has tended to prioritise explanation using individual factors. Among the 11 peer reviewed studies noted above that specifically address antecedents to sports club volunteering, nine have used quantitative methods to isolate factors that determine whether and why people volunteer. However, these quantitative studies privilege pre-determined variables and underplay the

complexity of the situational context. This literature review has identified an emergent case for greater consideration of organisational and interpersonal influences. Our current understanding of how members come to volunteer is mostly limited to knowing potentially relevant factors without necessarily having an in-depth knowledge of how they influence volunteers' decisions. Literature suggests a temporal dimension to how members become volunteers, which is grounded in a dynamic and interactive social life. It follows from this that, within membership-based sports clubs, social interactions may have a catalytic effect on whether an individual becomes a volunteer. Yet, there is an absence of research on this. Our understanding of volunteering in voluntary sports clubs would, therefore, benefit from a deeper grounding in social context. As such, this study aims to understand how members' organisational experiences affect their decision to volunteer within their voluntary sports club, with an emphasis on the influence of social interactions.

2.6   The volunteer experience

2.6.1   Introduction

To understand the development of volunteer commitment within voluntary sports clubs, we must consider the experiences of volunteers. As shall be described below, literature has identified individual, organisational and interpersonal factors that influence the volunteer experience. While literature is useful in highlighting a range of factors that influence volunteers, it shall be argued that many of these factors are generic to all volunteers regardless of context. Few studies have considered how the distinctive characteristics of voluntary sports clubs shape the volunteer experience. For a more contextually sympathetic understanding of the volunteering experience, there is a need to assess how sports clubs' democratic constitution and focus on satisfying members' shared interest influences the experience of volunteers.

2.6.2   Individual

In considering the volunteer experience, we start with the contribution of the individual. This is a logical starting point because the volunteering experience is determined, at least in part, by what each individual brings and contributes to their role. As shall be shown below, the contribution of each volunteer includes time, effort, values and motivation (Nichols, 2005; Bang et al., 2013; Ringuet-Riot et al., 2014; Sheptak and Menaker, 2016). However, whereas individual factors were widely considered as antecedents to volunteering, they have received comparatively less attention as determinants of the volunteering experience.

The volunteering experience is influenced by the amount of time and effort that a volunteer is willing to put into a role. Different levels of involvement have been found among volunteers. Based on an omnibus survey of over 8,000 individuals in England, Nichols (2005) characterised sports club volunteers contributing more than 300 hours each year as 'stalwarts', noting that these volunteers had higher levels of motivation than other volunteers. Similarly, using a small survey of volunteers in three community sports clubs, Ringuet-Riot et al. (2014) distinguished between core volunteers that spend significant amounts of time volunteering and other volunteers that remain more peripheral. However, such analysis of time spent volunteering has its limitations, not least because it tends to focus on measurable inputs rather than the quality of the experience.

Individuals bring personal values and motivations to their volunteering, which are either satisfied or frustrated by the volunteer experience. While research has revealed linkages between volunteer motivation and satisfaction within the setting of a community sports organisation (Bang et al., 2013), the analysis has limitations because of its reliance on a small quantitative survey of 214 volunteers in the United States. The analysis also rests on social exchange theory and assumes that individuals act instrumentally. As noted in section 2.5

above, sports club volunteering is often inspired by social and emotional involvement, which may not be conducive to making rational choices. Furthermore, satisfaction is dependent on experience, which is mediated by the organisational setting. Indeed, an ethnographic study of a multi-sports organisation in a deprived area of the United States illustrated how volunteers' motivations can be frustrated within ineffectual organisations (Sheptak and Menaker, 2016). This study demonstrated how it is difficult to understand the experience of volunteers and how organisational commitment develops unless organisational influences are taken into account.

2.6.3   Organisational influences

It is reasonable to suppose that organisations shape the volunteer experience. Indeed, the wider voluntary sector literature offers plenty of empirical support for organisational factors influencing the volunteer experience and whether volunteers stay in their roles (Wilson, 2012). This section, therefore, reviews literature that has considered volunteer experience as a result of club size, location, internal bureaucracy and volunteer management practices.

In voluntary sports club research, the influence of club size on the volunteer experience has been a recurrent theme (Wicker and Breuer, 2013a; Wicker et al., 2014; Schlesinger and Nagel, 2018). There is, however, no consensus on whether the volunteer experience is enhanced or impaired in larger clubs. Studies into the effect of club size on the volunteer experience and volunteer retention have yielded contradictory evidence. Whereas Wicker and Breuer (2013) found that smaller sports clubs had fewer problems retaining volunteers, Schlesinger and Nagel (2018) found that club size did not affect volunteers' intention to continue volunteering. Both studies relied on quantitative data, with the former surveying 19,345 German sports clubs and the later 477 volunteers across 26 Swiss and German sports clubs. The paradoxical findings from these surveys suggest that it is difficult to conclude that club size determines the volunteer experience. It seems likely that a range of other contextual factors within clubs are likely to affect the volunteer experience.

Similar limitations are evident among efforts to establish whether a club's location affects the volunteering experience. While volunteers' intention to stop volunteering within Swiss and German sports clubs was found to be lower in rural clubs than urban ones (Schlesinger and Nagel, 2018), this probably reflects a greater availability of alternative social and recreational options in urban settings that result in less stable membership and volunteering. It may also reflect other underlying characteristics associated with location. It seems likely that any relationship between club location and volunteering experience is more deeply embedded within clubs' structures, processes and internal relationships.

The volunteer experience has often been considered in the context of club bureaucracy. In the wider voluntary sector literature, it has been argued that some formal coordination is needed to provide structure to volunteer activity, but not so much that it alienates volunteers (Musick and Wilson, 2008). Within sport, as national governing bodies sought to improve sports club performance, concerns have been expressed that introducing too much bureaucracy discourages participation and volunteering (Taylor et al., 2003). These concerns remain, although it is recognised that there are arguments both for and against formalisation (Nichols, 2017).

Research has identified that formal management benefits volunteering in specific sports club settings. Two separate qualitative studies highlighted the need for formalisation in volunteer coordination, with one study investigating volunteer coaches in Australian Rules Football (Rundle-Thiele and Auld, 2009) and the other youth sport coaches (Harman and Doherty, 2014). Although these studies are limited to volunteer coaches, both found that good club administration improved the volunteer experience. In sports clubs with large junior sections, it is understandable that effective administration enhances the experience of volunteer coaches, not least because volunteers need to have a clear understanding of their role. Ambiguity is rarely helpful. Indeed, role

ambiguity was associated with lower levels of satisfaction and organisational commitment among volunteers in a study of board members from provincial voluntary sport organisations in Canada (Sakires et al., 2009). Although this quantitative study has limitations because of its reliance on a small sample, it highlights how formalisation can contribute towards role clarity and, in turn, volunteer satisfaction and commitment. The greater formality that tends to exist in larger voluntary sport clubs (Nichols et al., 2015) is perhaps unsurprising given that the limitations of informality are more readily exposed in more complex organisations.

The appropriateness and effectiveness of bureaucracy may be a more significant factor than the amount of it. A longitudinal survey based study of Australian sports club committee members found that perceived committee effectiveness enhanced their commitment to the organisation (Cuskelly et al., 1998). Yet, the same research project found that perceived committee functioning was not a strong predictor of whether volunteers left a committee (Cuskelly and Boag, 2001). The discrepancies are not easily explained. A more inductive qualitative approach may have revealed more about how volunteers interpret their experience on the committee, and how this influenced their commitment and decisions to continue or terminate their volunteering. An ethnographic study, which used grounded theory coding, showed how poor task management contributed to volunteer frustration within a community sport organisation (Sheptak and Menaker, 2016). While the distinctive United States context of this study places limitations on the transferability of findings, it seems reasonable to argue, at the very least, that ineffective bureaucracy does not enhance the volunteer experience and restricts the development of organisational commitment.

Human resource management theory has been influential in shaping volunteer management practice. This is evident in sports club practitioner literature, which draws heavily on human resource management theory (Taylor et al., 2015). However, the effectiveness of applying human resource management

theory to volunteers remains somewhat equivocal. As illustrated by a recent review of voluntary sector literature, there is a growing but still limited body of empirical evidence to show that volunteer management practices affect volunteer outcomes (Einolf, 2018). In relation to voluntary sports clubs, the evidence base is surprisingly limited. Findings from a quantitative survey of 375 amateur rugby union clubs in Australia found that the application of human resource management practices had some effect on volunteer retention (Cuskelly et al., 2006). However, only planning was generally effective, with training, support and orientation practices partially effective depending on the type of volunteer. The study was limited by its reliance on a single national sporting context and the subjective judgments of club officials to measure 'retention problems'. Nevertheless, it is remarkable that other studies have not sought to test the influence of a broad range of human resource management practices in other voluntary sports club contexts.

Although many human resource management practices have received limited attention from researchers, the influence of volunteer recognition on the volunteer experience has been considered extensively. An early and widely cited study of volunteer behaviour first asserted that the active recognition of volunteers was a significant contributor to a positive volunteer experience and volunteer retention (Pearce, 1993). Although Cuskelly et al. (2006) found no significant relationship between recognition and retention in their study of Australian rugby union club volunteers, these findings are at odds with other volunteering studies across a range of different voluntary sectors (Einolf, 2018). More recently, a European-wide study into the determinants of volunteer satisfaction, which surveyed 13,082 sports club volunteers in 10 countries, found recognition to be the most significant factor (Nagel et al., 2019). However, the study is not entirely conclusive. The independent variables used to measure recognition included whether the club honours volunteers and whether volunteers felt that their work was appreciated. It is unclear from this whether volunteer recognition was a deliberate management practice of sports clubs or just a feature of everyday practice and club culture. While honouring

volunteers implies some active management practices, volunteers' feeling of appreciation could simply reflect the way club members informally thank their volunteers. Thus, while recognition plays a role in shaping the volunteer experience and club commitment, more understanding is needed about the different forms of recognition and how sports club volunteers react to the different types.

The organisational influences on volunteering discussed above could reasonably apply to all types of voluntary organisations, not just sports clubs. Many of the concepts, including bureaucracy and human resource management practices, have been imported from the employment domain. The importing of concepts is problematic because employment is essentially an undemocratic phenomenon, whereas sports club volunteering takes place within democratic organisations. As noted when defining voluntary sports clubs in section 2.2, volunteers are usually also voting members and contribute towards the provision of goods and services for their fellow members. It is a shortcoming of literature that it has not yet considered whether and how some of the distinctive features of voluntary sports clubs affects the volunteer experience.

Internal association democracy is a significant feature of voluntary sports clubs. Association democracy has been described as members' involvement in the discussions and decisions concerning the collective affairs of the association (Ibsen, 2019). Whereas associations have long been regarded as exemplars of participatory democracy (Putnam, 2000; De Tocqueville, 2003; Jaitner, 2019), there are surprisingly few studies of the internal democracies of voluntary sports clubs. The health of associational democracy has occasionally been questioned, especially when large memberships tend towards the centralisation of decision-making (Horton Smith, 2000). Voluntary sports clubs are sometimes at risk of becoming self-perpetuating oligarchies run by the committed minority (Hill, 2002; Nichols, 2005). More recently, Ibsen et al. (2019) provided a substantial assessment of democratic participation in European sports clubs, using data from 12,755 members from 642 sports clubs across 10 countries.

They found that a minority of voluntary sports club members participate in formal democracy, such as the annual general assembly. Members were more likely to engage in informal democracy, such as talking to others and sharing views. Importantly, from our vantage point, the research found that regular volunteers participated more in both informal and formal democracy than other members. With volunteers deeply involved in club democracy, this suggests that the nature and functioning of internal democracy may affect the volunteer experience. More research is needed to explore how internal club democracy influences volunteers.

Finally, the influence of sporting performance has also not featured widely in research seeking to understand the volunteer experience. While Rundle-Thiele and Auld (2009) found that competitive sporting success contributed towards volunteers' continued involvement, the transferability of these findings from the realm of junior coaches in Australian Rules Football to other volunteer roles and contexts has never been explored. Perhaps, the broader point to be taken away from qualitative studies that have closely examined volunteering within specific organisational contexts (Rundle-Thiele and Auld, 2009; Sheptak and Menaker, 2016) is that idiosyncratic organisational conditions often play a crucial role in determining the volunteer experience.

2.6.4   Interpersonal and social group influences

Within the wider voluntary sector literature, volunteering has been characterised as essentially a group activity (Haski-Leventhal and Cnaan, 2009). This interpersonal relations perspective seems especially relevant to voluntary sports clubs given their associational character, as noted above when defining voluntary sports clubs in section 2.2. This literature review, therefore, turns to the influence of interpersonal relationships on the volunteer experience.

Since sports volunteering can be considered a leisure-time activity (Stebbins, 2004, 2012; Robinson et al., 2017), it is reasonable that volunteers should want to operate within a framework of agreeable social relationships. Indeed,

qualitative research that explored the expectations of volunteers in Australian rugby union clubs highlighted how volunteers expect to work within a pleasant social environment (Taylor et al., 2006). There is additional evidence to show that sports club volunteers that receive support from other club members are more likely to be satisfied with their role and continue volunteering. In their qualitative study of Australian Rules Football coaches, Rundle-Thiele and Auld (2009) found that support from parents and the club encouraged a good coach experience and sustained volunteering. A more recent quantitative pan-European study involving 13,082 volunteers across 642 clubs found that club support, including perceptions of support from other members, heled to sustain volunteer satisfaction (Nagel et al., 2019). Through quantitative research, German and Swiss volunteers have also been found to display a higher commitment to volunteering in sports clubs that value conviviality (Schlesinger and Nagel, 2018). Similar findings were found in a qualitative study based in US running club, where conviviality among volunteers helped to promote collective group identities and sustain volunteerism (Wegner et al., 2019). Social cohesion among Canadian sports club volunteer board members was also found to correlate with volunteer satisfaction (Doherty and Carron, 2003). While only two of the studies noted above used qualitative methods to explore in depth the complex nature of social relationships within sports clubs and volunteers' perceptions of these, altogether these studies provide a range of evidence to indicate that positive relations with other organisational members are beneficial to the volunteer experience.

There is also evidence to suggest that volunteers are adversely affected by negative relationships. In a qualitative study of older adult volunteers in community sport organisations in Canada, Misener et al. (2010) found that negative interpersonal relations with other club members caused tension, anxiety and disappointment. This study provides a salutary reminder that a shared passion for a sport does not necessarily translate into positive interpersonal relations. It is also a reminder that research must seek to understand the complexities of volunteers' interpersonal relationships, both

good and bad. Studies that rely on quantitative data to make correlations between social conditions and volunteers' feelings (Doherty and Carron, 2003; Schlesinger and Nagel, 2018; Nagel et al., 2019) may fail to uncover some of this complexity. It is, therefore, important to make use of interpretive research to explore the meanings that volunteers ascribe to their relationships.

2.6.5   Summary

In summary, the literature indicates that organisational context matters when it comes to understanding the volunteer experience. Appropriate levels of bureaucracy, effective organisational practices and the provision of adequate resources enhance the volunteer experience. Volunteer management practices also affect the volunteer experience, although it remains unclear how practices, such as recognition, are applied within sports clubs. Importantly, the quality of volunteers' relationships is clearly a significant factor in understanding the volunteer experience within sports clubs, although more research is needed to understand volunteers' everyday interactions, what they mean to volunteers, and how these affect the way they feel about their club.

It is notable how sports club volunteering research has tended to investigate organisational factors that have been found to be influential in other volunteering contexts, including structural features, bureaucracy and human resource management. Comparatively less attention has been paid to the features of voluntary sports clubs that distinguish them from many other volunteer settings, including sporting focus and internal club democracy. Furthermore, because of the preponderance of cross-sectional quantitative studies within the literature, limited attention has been paid to how the volunteer experience evolves over time as volunteers interact with the organisation and its members.

2.7 The nature of organisational commitment

2.7.1 Introduction

Without the financial incentives of work, volunteers are arguably less dependent than employees on their organisations, which leads to less subordination to the system of organisational behaviour (Pearce, 1993). This places greater emphasis on other factors to bind volunteers to organisations. This section of the literature review considers the nature of organisational commitment among sports club volunteers and how its formation contributes towards desirable organisational outcomes, including sustained volunteerism and improved performance.

For the avoidance of doubt, this section of the literature review is restricted to considering the feelings that volunteers have towards their sports clubs. This literature review does not cover job satisfaction, which is a measure of an individual's contentment with the work they do (Mullins, 2010). Whereas job satisfaction gauges an employee's response to a particular role, organisational commitment is a psychological response to the organisation as a whole. Although often correlated, organisational commitment and job satisfaction have been shown to be distinguishable from each other (Meyer et al., 2002). Organisational commitment is useful within the context of sports clubs because the concept remains relevant throughout an individual's involvement with the organisation, including when an individual is a member and when an individual moves into and out of a volunteer role.

2.7.2 Conceptualisation organisational commitment

In the field of organisational research, organisational commitment has been conceptualised in a variety of different ways (Fields, 2002). This is because organisational commitment is generally accepted to be a multi-dimensional concept and is susceptible to different constructions. Organisational commitment can be behavioural, with an emphasis on whether an individual

intends to stay with an organisation. It can also be attitudinal, with an emphasis on feelings and emotions towards an organisation. As such, a consensus on the nature of organisational commitment has not been reached. Nevertheless, two forms of organisational commitment (Mowday et al., 1979; Meyer and Allen, 1991) have risen to prominence in the study of organisational behaviour, including in the study of sports club volunteers.

Mowday et al. (1979; 1982) first conceptualised organisational commitment as an individual's identification with and involvement in an organisation. Their conceptualisation was essentially attitudinal. They assigned three aspects to the definition: a strong belief in and acceptance of the organisation's goals and values; a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organisation; and, a strong desire to maintain membership of the organisation. This concept was developed through empirical research among employees from a range of industries in the United States (Mowday et al., 1979). A 15-item organisational commitment questionnaire (Mowday et al., 1979) and a shortened 9-item questionnaire (Mowday et al., 1982) have since been used extensively within organisational research. From an interpretivist perspective, applying pre-determined measurement scales across diverse contexts is concerning because it does not allow for the emergence of subjective experience. This limits our understanding of how peoples' experiences and perspectives are shaped by organisational context to form distinctive forms of commitment.

Meyer and Allen's (1991, 1997) three-component model is the other commonly used conceptualisation of organisational commitment. It too was developed within North American employment settings. The model defines commitment as comprising three components: affective commitment as an emotional attachment; normative commitment as an obligation to stay; and, continuance commitment as an intention to stay. This conceptualisation combines both attitudinal and behavioural aspects, which is potentially muddling as it clouds what the concept is intended to convey. Indeed, the model has been criticised for merely predicting turnover of staff through its reliance on behavioural

intentions (Solinger et al., 2008), thereby detracting from its attitudinal dimensions. As with Mowday et al's conceptualisation, Meyer and Allen's three-component model of organisational has been used extensively in organisational research across a diverse range of settings. This too presents concerns about how our understanding of individual subjectivity and distinctive organisational context are forfeited when applying the conceptual measurement scales, especially when those contexts may be substantially different to the North American employment settings in which they were developed.

When applying the three-component model to volunteers, the normative commitment dimension was found to have limited utility and the continuance commitment dimension no use (Preston and Brown, 2004; Stephens et al., 2004; Dawley et al., 2005; Engelberg et al., 2012). Since continuance commitment is based on the need to stay in a role, given the lack of financial incentives in volunteering, it has understandable limitations in volunteering. Normative commitment is based on felt obligations and it is plausible that volunteers might feel some form of moral duty or social pressure to sustain their volunteering. That said, normative commitment's comparative limitations in predicting volunteer behaviour may be due to the moral and social complexities of volunteering, including to whom obligations are felt. Obligations could be felt to the organisation as a whole, beneficiaries, staff or fellow volunteers. A short survey questionnaire may not readily reveal these complexities.

Affective organisational commitment has tended to be the most successful element of the three-component model in predicting volunteer behaviour (Preston and Brown, 2004; Stephens et al., 2004; Dawley et al., 2005; Engelberg et al., 2012). Affective commitment is defined as an emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in an organisation (Meyer and Allen, 1991). It is essentially an attitudinal phenomenon in which an individual is well disposed towards an organisation and wants to continue volunteering. In the context of volunteering, where financial incentives are absent, it is

understandable that affective commitment has established itself as a useful concept.

Meyer and Allen (1997) have themselves identified that affective organisational commitment is similar to Mowday et al's (1979; 1982) conceptualisation of organisational commitment. Table 3 highlights the similarity between the concepts.

Table 3 - Comparison of affective organisational commitment definitions

	Organisational commitment (Mowday et al, 1982)	**Affective organisational commitment (Meyer and Allen, 1991)**
Definition	The strength of an individual's identification and involvement with an organisation, characterised by: • a belief in the goals and values of the organisation; • a willingness to work for the organisation; and, • a desire to maintain membership of the organisation.	The emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in an organisation.

2.7.3   Organisational commitment in sports club volunteers

Although both forms of affective organisational commitment were initially developed for understanding employees, they have been used in the study of sports club volunteers. Cuskelly et al. (1998) performed early work to extend the applicability of organisational commitment to sports clubs by investigating the development of organisational commitment among volunteer sport administrators in Australia. They noted that demographic factors, levels of involvement and perceptions of organisational effectiveness influenced the development of organisational commitment. Further findings published from the same study found that volunteer administrators with high and stable

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organisational commitment were less likely to leave their committee (Cuskelly and Boag, 2001). While the use of longitudinal data in this study strengthened the causal claims made, the study only looked at whether volunteers left the committee. It is conceivable that volunteer board members stepped down from the committee but took up other volunteer roles in their sports club, or at least remained a member. This is relevant because affective organisational commitment is an emotion directed towards the organisation and not towards a particular role.

Other studies have looked at the development and impact of organisational commitment within grassroots sport. In a quantitative study that surveyed 214 regular and long-term volunteers from 22 voluntary sports organisations in the USA, Bang et al. (2013) found that when a volunteer's values were satisfied through their volunteering, they experienced higher levels of affective organisational commitment. However, the characteristics of the voluntary sports organisations included in this study remain unclear, thereby limiting our understanding of context and any potential transferability of findings. Moreover, the use of a pre-determined short list of statements to measure values precluded an understanding of volunteers' subjective expression of their own values.

Hoye (2007) investigated the impact of organisational commitment on performance. His quantitative study asserted a causal relationship between the affective organisational commitment of voluntary board members and board performance. However, since the context for this study was local horseracing clubs in Australia, it is not altogether certain that the findings will transfer to more common voluntary sports club contexts. The study also relied on the subjective self-reporting of board performance by survey respondents, thereby casting concerns over assessments of performance. Moreover, it is doubtful whether a quantitative study was best placed to capture the complex relationships between volunteer involvement, affective commitment and organisational performance.

Schlesinger et al. (2013) drew upon affective organisational commitment in developing the social and emotional attachment component to their concept of collective solidarity. Other components included: collective interest and commitment; and, open communication and cooperation. They had developed collective solidarity as a more contextually sympathetic concept for measuring organisational attachment among sports club volunteers. Through a survey of 345 volunteers across 20 Swiss football clubs, they subsequently found that social and emotional commitment was the most influential of the collective solidarity factors in sustaining intentions to continue volunteering (Schlesinger et al., 2019). The questions items devised by Schlesinger et al. (2013, 2019) to measure social and emotional attachment were: I feel that I belong to the club; I am proud to be able to say that I belong to the club; I enjoy attending club events; I like being in our club; and, I often discuss club affairs with other members.

It is apparent how Schlesinger et al.'s (2013) conceptualisation of social and emotional attachment is similar to affective organisational commitment (Mowday et al., 1979; Meyer and Allen, 1991) with statements targeting identification and involvement. The statements seem, however, better adapted to the voluntary sports club context. That said, the list of measures illustrates the limitations of using quantitative surveys to understand how volunteers feel about their sports clubs. Whether a limited set of statements can do justice to the complex feelings that volunteers have to their sports clubs is doubtful. The statements make assumptions about the types of involvement that a volunteer may have. For example, with the statement on 'attending club events', it is unclear what exactly constitutes an 'event' and interpretations of this may differ depending on the context. Furthermore, the enjoyment of an event doesn't necessarily inspire attachment. By way of an analogy, one can enjoy visiting a restaurant, but it requires a leap of faith to assume that regular visits imply a social and emotional attachment to the restaurant. Therefore, even though Schlesinger et al's (2013) conceptualisation of social and emotional

attachment seems better adapted to the voluntary sports club context, the limited and pre-determined set of questions still places significant constraints on our understanding of volunteers' feelings.

In the broader human resource management literature, it has long been recognised that employees can develop organisational commitments to targets other than the organisation as an overall entity (Meyer and Herscovitch, 2001). Engelberg et al. (2012) were the first to apply this principle to volunteers in sports clubs. They discovered multiple targets for volunteers' commitment, including the organisation, other volunteers and the volunteer role. This was a significant finding, indicating that the focus of organisational commitment is often complex. There are, however, limitations to note from this study. The study investigated volunteers from Little Athletics Clubs in Australia, which provide athletic activities for children and young people. Thus, the targets of commitment seem particular to the youth sport context. In other contexts, such as adult sports clubs, there may be other targets of commitment, including other club members, professional staff and coaches. Furthermore, while this study found that volunteers distinguished their affective commitment between different targets, such psychological distinctions may be blurred in other sports club contexts. For example, in adult sport, affective commitments to fellow club members and volunteers could be indistinguishable, not least because individuals may be both playing members and volunteers. Thus, while Engelberg et al's (2012) study made advances in our understanding of organisational commitment among sport club volunteers, it also revealed a need for more research to understand the complexities of organisational commitment within voluntary sports club settings.

2.7.4 Summary

Organisational commitment has become common currency in the management of sports club volunteers (Cuskelly et al., 2006; Taylor et al., 2015) yet, as outlined above, the body of research evidence underpinning this is hardly extensive. While there is some evidence to suggest affective organisational

commitment helps us understand and explain sustained volunteering, organisational commitment concepts were developed through employment research. Studies to assess organisational commitment's relevance to sports club volunteers remains surprisingly limited. Moreover, the use of quantitative surveys, with pre-determined statements to measure commitment, has constrained our ability to understand the complex psychologies that bind volunteers to sports clubs. Conceptualisations of organisational commitment used in the study of volunteers in voluntary sports club lack inductive foundations and appear contextually unsympathetic. The complex organisational and social character of sports clubs means that there are many potential targets of affection, including the organisation, the volunteer role, professional staff, physical places, other volunteers and other members. Given voluntary sports clubs' distinctive feature of member ownership, there is a need to understand how volunteers relate to members and how this is reflected in their organisational commitment. As such, there remains much scope to research and understand forms of organisational commitment within the context of voluntary sports clubs. Opportunities remain for exploratory qualitative research to understand this complex phenomenon.

2.8   Conclusions from the literature review

This literature review began with the aim of examining what is known about the nature of organisational commitment among voluntary sports club volunteers and how it develops. The meaning of 'voluntary sports club' and 'volunteering' were considered, and appropriate definitions agreed for this thesis. The review then used the volunteer process model (Snyder and Omoto, 2008) as a theoretical framework to guide the review of the literature. Using this framework, the review considered what literature has to say on how voluntary sports club members become volunteers, the experience of volunteers and the nature of the organisational commitment that develops among volunteers. Individual, organisational and interpersonal influences on the development of

organisational commitment were considered at both the antecedent and experience stages.

The literature on sports club volunteering is dominated by quantitative studies that use survey-based instruments, with many concepts imported from other contexts. The observation that sports volunteering literature is dominated by quantitative survey-based research has been made before (Groom et al., 2014), yet this was seven years ago and there is still a lack of qualitative research addressing the social realities of volunteering in sports clubs. It remains the case that limited attention has been paid to the distinctive contextual features of voluntary sports clubs, such as the sporting focus, club membership and democratic structures, and how volunteers' experiences of these affect the way they feel. This perhaps reflects the tendency of existing research to concentrate on the individual as the unit of analysis, with less done to analyse volunteering at the organisational and the interpersonal level of analysis. Research into sports club volunteering may, therefore, benefit from a deeper grounding in the social context of voluntary sports clubs. Crucially, while literature has noted that social relationships influence volunteers in voluntary sports clubs, more research is needed to understand how volunteers' everyday social interactions make them feel.

That volunteers come from among a club's membership is a vital point made by the literature. This adds emphasis to the importance of understanding a volunteer's experiences across their entire period of membership, not just the time they spend volunteering. Indeed, the literature suggests a temporal dimension to the formation of organisational commitment. It is, therefore, surprising that there is an absence of research on how volunteers' feelings evolve through experience, especially as they interact with the organisation and its members.

Finally, although sports research literature has used the concept of affective organisational commitment to gauge how volunteers feel about their clubs, the

body of research evidence underpinning its use is hardly extensive. Conceptualisations of organisational commitment used in the study of sports club volunteers often lack inductive foundations and risk a lack of sensitivity to context. Given voluntary sports clubs' distinctive features, there remains scope for exploratory research to consider the nature of organisational commitment of their volunteers.

By drawing the threads of the literature review together, a research question can be formulated for the study of sports club volunteers' organisational commitment that considers organisational context and temporal aspects. In particular, the research question for this study is: *How do volunteers' experiences within voluntary sports clubs shape their commitment to the organisation?* The research methodology chapter that follows describes the steps taken to address this research question.

3   Research Methodology

3.1   Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to describe and justify the research methodology used in this thesis. The chapter starts by setting out the research aims and the constructivist philosophical assumptions underpinning the research. The chapter goes on to examine the grounded theory method, which is the research approach used in this study. After examining the core components of grounded theory, the chapter discusses the distinctive aspects of the constructivist strand, before justifying its use in this study. The chapter then describes the research design, starting with the data collection strategy and how theoretical sampling was applied. The chosen data collection methods of observation, documents and semi-structured interviews are then covered. Data coding and analysis are discussed, including a coverage of initial, focussed and theoretical coding, and the techniques used to build theory. The chapter closes with considerations of reflexive practice, methodological evaluation and research ethics.

3.2   Research aims

At the outset of this methodology chapter, it is important to set out the research problem. This is because the research question determines the design and conduct of empirical investigations (Wallace and Wray, 2016). Accordingly, the research question for this study is: ***How do volunteers' experiences within voluntary sports clubs shape their commitment to the organisation?***

The nature of the research question is exploratory. While it assumes that volunteers develop organisational commitment, the nature and development of this commitment remain open to investigation. The research question encourages investigation into the organisational conditions of golf clubs and how these conditions influence the volunteer experience and the development of organisational commitment. It inspires us to understand the experiences of

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golf club volunteers from their perspective. This lends itself to an interpretive approach and qualitative research.

As England Golf supports the PhD, the thesis also aims to develop knowledge that will have practical implications for golf clubs. More specifically, the study aims to generate practical guidance that England Golf can use to support golf clubs recruit and retain volunteers. In forming these aims, it is recognised that there are challenges in constructing cohesive conceptual accounts that will prove useful and in respecting the variety of research participants' subjective experiences.

3.3 Philosophical positioning

At this juncture, it is important to spell out the philosophical positioning that underpins the thesis. A clear statement of philosophical positioning ensures that research can be conducted and evaluated in a consistent way (Madill et al., 2000). This section, therefore, sets out the constructivist research paradigm used in this study. It describes the ontological and epistemological assumptions of a constructivist paradigm. It also explains why a constructivist paradigm is well-suited to addressing this study's research aims.

The constructivist philosophical paradigm is ontologically relative (Lincoln et al., 2011). It asserts that individuals create meaning as they interact with and interpret the world around them. Meaning does not lie dormant within objects waiting to be discovered. As a consequence, constructivism assumes that the social world comprises multiple constructed realities that are not determined by natural laws (Crotty, 1998).

Since reality is assumed to be a construction, constructivism assumes the social world cannot be understood independent of the people that construct and make sense of that reality (Lincoln et al., 2011). People actively build knowledge and are not passive recipients of information. Thus, constructivism assumes

that knowledge is dependent on the experience and perspective of the knower (Constantino, 2008). In taking this perspective, constructivism challenges objectivist notions that 'truth' is captured through research (Crotty, 1998).

In a constructivist research paradigm, there is an emphasis on the empathic understanding of human behaviour. Constructivists attend to interpretively understanding the meanings constructed by individuals as they act in this world, rather than looking to explain phenomena (Crotty, 1998). This places constructivism within the broader paradigm of interpretivism, in which the pursuit of understanding is considered appropriate for investigating phenomena in the social sciences (Constantino, 2008).

There are multiple forms of constructivism, including psychological constructivism, social constructivism and radical constructivism (Constantino, 2008). This study tends towards social constructivism whereby knowledge is embedded in social contexts and social interactions. Social constructivism prioritises the study of phenomena within their social settings. This allows the researcher to scrutinise instances from the empirical world and then construct interpretations of human action and meanings. A social constructivist perspective supposes that human experience varies across different social contexts. It should not, therefore, be assumed that the experience of volunteers inside golf clubs is the same as the experience of volunteers in other settings. A close examination of the social world of golf clubs is needed to understand golf club volunteers.

This study aims for an interpretive understanding of golf club volunteers that accounts for their context. It aims to explore how volunteers' interactions inside the golf club influence their thoughts and behaviour. Since people are assumed to construct meaning and action, the researcher must seek to understand how volunteers subjectively interpret their own experience. The researcher must try to see the situation as the volunteer perceives, interprets and assesses it.

As this study aims to inform practice, the researcher will need to employ conceptual analysis to account for human action. Accounts that merely describe a social world are limited in their ability to account for problematic issues (Charmaz, 2014). Conceptual analysis helps to circumvent the limits of perceptual experience. Conceptualisation fills in gaps and illuminates what would otherwise remain puzzling. In constructing concepts, the researcher inevitably deploys an element of imagination and creativity. These constructions must not, however, become divorced from perception. Strong concepts are founded on properties derived from the empirical world.

Overall, this research will not make claims for objective truth. Instead, by assuming the constructivist research paradigm, this thesis aims to construct an account of golf club volunteers that is plausible and consistent with the subjective experience of the volunteers.

3.4 The grounded theory method and its use in sport studies

The research approach used in this study is the grounded theory method. The main purpose of the grounded theory method is to build theory, whereby theory is defined as a statement of concepts and plausible relations between them (Urquhart, 2013). The method was first devised by Glaser and Strauss (1967) in reaction to armchair theorising and over-reliance on 'grand theory' that had little relevance to substantive cases in the empirical world. They had grown frustrated by how social research was used to verify theory and how qualitative research was maligned for a lack of rigour. Glaser and Strauss sought to close the gap between theory and empirical research by developing a vigorous method that generated theory from empirical data. They developed the grounded theory method as a way to create theory that has a good fit with the empirical world. The method achieves this through the systematic gathering and analysis of data. It is the grounding of theory in data collected from substantive cases, rather than trying to force data into pre-determined theory, that forms the essence of grounded theory.

Since Glaser and Strauss first set out the grounded theory method in 1967, their approach has grown in popularity. As academics from different philosophical persuasions have been drawn to the method, the approach has spawned several distinct strands. These strands include the Glaserian objectivist (Glaser, 1978, 1992, 2005), Straussian (Corbin and Strauss, 2008), constructivist (Charmaz, 2014), situational analysis (Clarke, 2005), critical realist (Kempster and Parry, 2011), pluralist (Urquhart, 2013) and pragmatist (Bryant, 2017).

The grounded theory method has become popular in multiple fields of research, especially nursing, health and education. Figure 6 shows how grounded theory has been used within social science disciplines over the past 10 years. Although some studies only used grounded theory for data coding, rather than the full methods package, the data visualisation nonetheless demonstrates the viability of grounded theory as a research method within the social sciences.

Figure 6 - Academic journal articles that refer to 'grounded theory' in their title, abstract or keywords between 2010-2019

(Source: Web of Science database, accessed 28th April 2020)
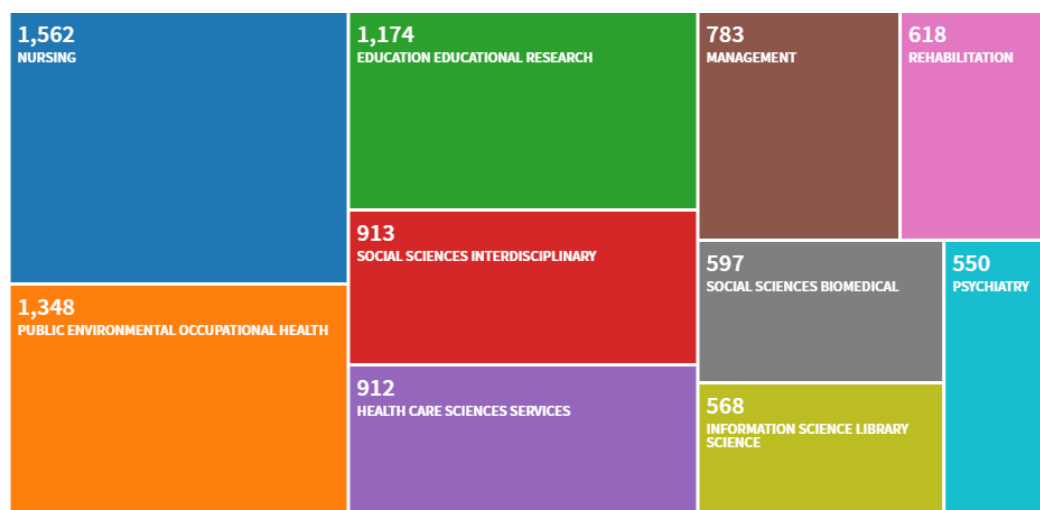
Within the field of sport management and other sport disciplines, although scholars have used the grounded theory method, its popularity as a research

method is modest. Figure 7 shows how grounded theory has been used within sport-related academic journal articles over the past 10 years. There has been widespread use of grounded theory method in sport and exercise sciences and sports psychology, although there is more limited use by sport sociology and sport management scholars. Nevertheless, the popularity of the grounded theory method is growing, as highlighted in Figure 8. Academic debates around the application of grounded theory method within sport disciplines are increasingly apparent (Weed, 2009; Holt and Tamminen, 2010). The grounded theory method also now features in sport management qualitative research methods textbooks (Edwards and Skinner, 2009). Furthermore, Sotiriadou and Shilbury (2010) have argued that greater use of the grounded theory method would strengthen sport management research.

Figure 7 - Academic journal articles that refer to 'grounded theory' and 'sport' in their title, abstract or keywords between 2010-2019

(Source: Web of Science database, accessed 28th April 2020)
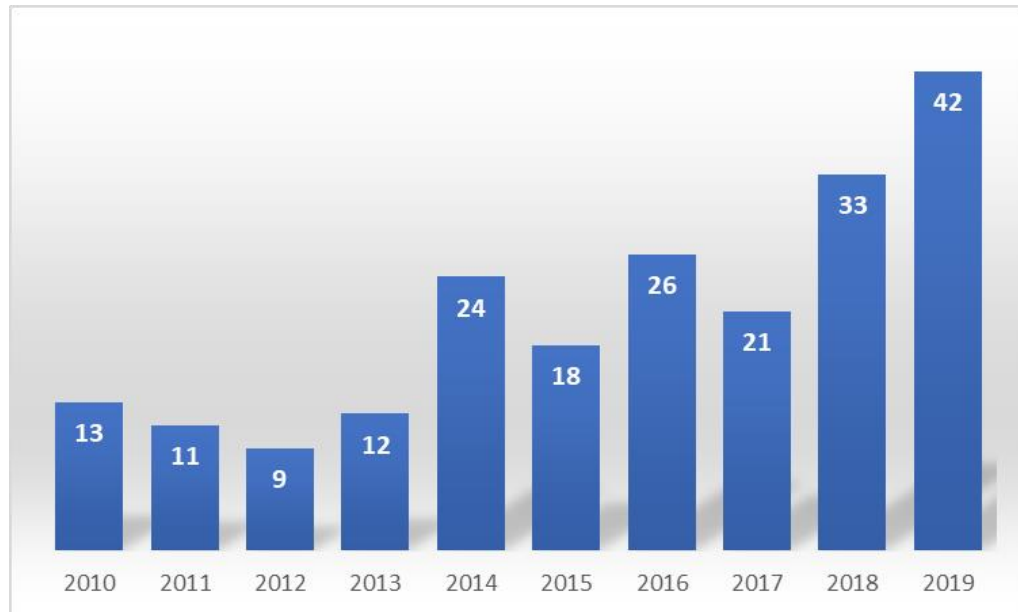
Grounded theory studies, covering a diverse range of topics, have been published in sport management and sport sociology journals. Recent well-cited papers that demonstrate full use of the grounded theory method include studies on: the participation of adult male offenders in fitness training and organised sports (Van Hout and Phelan, 2014); parenting practices in sport (Wheeler and Green, 2014); corporate social responsibility in English football (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2014); and, the impact of amateur endurance athletes' serious leisure careers on their spouses (Lamont et al., 2019). This study's use of the grounded theory method should, therefore, add to the advancement of the methodology within the sport management literature.

3.5   The core components of the grounded theory method

Before considering the nature of the constructivist strand of grounded theory, it is first worth reflecting on the core components of grounded theory. While each strand of grounded theory advocates slightly different procedures in line with their philosophical positioning, several core components unite them. Drawing

on a range of work analysing the grounded theory method (Suddaby, 2006; Weed, 2009; Holt and Tamminen, 2010; Urquhart, 2013; Urquhart and Fernández, 2016; Timonen et al., 2018), Table 4 summarises the core components. These features apply to the grounded theory method, regardless of ontological and epistemological assumptions.

Table 4 – The core components of the grounded theory method

Aspect	Feature	Description of feature
Theory	Theory generation	The purpose of the grounded theory method is to generate theory, whereby theory is an abstract rendering of the social world. Theory is understood to comprise concepts and plausible relationships between them.
	Theory is grounded in the data	The understanding of phenomena is grounded in the data. The researcher remains open to unanticipated findings. Concepts come from the data rather than the literature. The researcher intentionally avoids forcing data into a priori categories by leaving in the background their knowledge of existing theory.
Data collection	Collection of rich data	Data collection aims to generate rich description for analysis. Data is typically gathered from multiple sources, including interviews, observation and documents.
	Theoretical sampling	The use of theoretical sampling is central to the grounded theory method, whereby data collection is guided by the concepts that become apparent from data analysis. Data collection and data analysis are performed concurrently to facilitate theoretical sampling. This permits the researcher to go back and forth between data collection and data analysis.
	Theoretical saturation	Data collection ends when new data no longer adds to the properties of theoretical concepts, nor sparks new theoretical insights.
Data analysis	Use of coding	Coding practices provide the tools necessary to describe, open-up and make sense of the data. Coding is an analytical act that promotes abstraction.
	Constant comparison	The researcher continually compares coded data, looking closely at different instances and their contextual conditions. The researcher looks for similarities and variation in the data.

3.6 Constructivist grounded theory method

The constructivist strand of grounded theory was developed by Kathy Charmaz and comprehensively described in her book, *'Constructing Grounded Theory'* (Charmaz, 2014). The book provides guidelines for performing grounded theory research in the constructivist paradigm. This section considers the distinctive characteristics of the constructivist strand.

In line with the constructivist research paradigm, constructivist grounded theory aims to generate conceptual analysis that emphasises understanding (Charmaz, 2014). Constructivist grounded theorists aim to produce interpretive theories that seek to understand how people construct meaning and act based on their view of reality. There is less emphasis on causal explanation and the 'why' of theories. Rather, the constructivist's attention is drawn to the 'what' and 'how', and to the 'who, where and when' (Whetten, 1989). In constructivist theorising, the 'who, where and when' are particularly significant because they represent the contextual conditions that bound theory. Constructivist grounded theorists are conscientious to not overlook and oversimplify variation in the who, where and when (Charmaz, 2014).

Constructivist grounded theory explicitly acknowledges the researcher in generating data and theory (Charmaz, 2014). It recognises that researchers form part of the research situation and their values, perspective and interactions affect it. When collecting data in the field, researchers construct meanings alongside research participants. Researcher constructions are also present in the analysis of data and in the theorising that follows. Thus, the researcher is understood to be active, rather than passive, in the construction of knowledge. This approach is different from the classic objectivist strand of grounded theory, which Charmaz (2014) criticises for naively assuming researcher objectivity. In contrast to the objectivist strand, where theory is assumed to emerge from data (Glaser, 1992), the constructivist strand acknowledges that theory is constructed. Thus, in presenting theory, the

constructivist researcher makes claims for a constructed reality and does not make claims for universal truth.

Since constructivism explicitly recognises the subjective role of the researcher, the researcher must take account of this. The need for researcher reflexivity is, therefore, an important consequence of assuming the constructivist position (Charmaz, 2014). Section 3.11 below discusses reflexivity in more detail.

3.7 Justification for using constructivist grounded theory method

Having set out the core components of the grounded theory method and the distinctive characteristics of the constructivist strand, this section outlines the rationale for using constructivist grounded theory in this study. The justification covers constructivist grounded theory's: fit with the research question and philosophical positioning; regard for substantive context; suitability for investigating sociological social psychology processes; and, ability to generate a convincing body of evidence.

Research studies must achieve alignment between the research problem, philosophical position and research approach (Saunders et al., 2019). In this study, the research problem seeks to understand the experience of golf club volunteers. Similarly, the philosophical positioning of this study is constructivist, thereby emphasising subjective experience and interpretive understanding. In both regards, the constructivist grounded theory method provides a good fit because it is consistent with the interpretive paradigm in which people construct meaning.

As highlighted in the introduction, in section 1.3 of chapter 1, there are few academic studies into golf clubs and none into golf club volunteers. Since this study is exploring the phenomena of volunteering in an understudied organisational context, it is appropriate to remain open to theoretical interpretations. In this regard, the grounded theory method offers a suitable

approach for exploring a phenomenon or process where knowledge is absent (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

Furthermore, sport has many distinctive characteristics and it is often inappropriate to import theory developed in other contexts (Doherty, 2013). An inductive approach is therefore legitimate for sports sector research, especially where it is exploratory. In this regard, the grounded theory method provides a good fit for this study. A grounded theory approach avoids the inherent risk of the deductive approach in which data is squeezed into contextually unsympathetic theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The grounded theory method's inductive nature and its openness to new findings ensure that it generates substantive theory that is firmly grounded in data.

Although the grounded theory method is orientated to induction and requires the researcher to set aside extant theory, this should not imply that the researcher engages in research as a 'blank slate' (Urquhart and Fernández, 2016). It is hardly plausible or desirable that anyone should start qualitative research devoid of theoretical preconceptions. A more credible suggestion is for researchers to approach their research with 'an open mind, as opposed to an empty head' (Dey, 1993 in Urquhart, 2013: 11). The researcher can still engage with pre-existing knowledge and literature, usually through an initial non-committal literature review and a later integrative review that compares the constructed theory with extant theories (Urquhart, 2013). This engagement with literature does not mean that the existing theory ensnares the researcher. Rather, the requirement to set aside literature at the start of the research, keep existing knowledge in the background and look at the data anew 'allows researchers to access existing knowledge of theory without being trapped in the view that it represents the final truth' (Urquhart and Fernández, 2016: 226).

The importance of understanding the phenomena of volunteering in the context of golf clubs is another justification for using the grounded theory method. The phenomenon of volunteering is complex and spans a wide range

of activities, organisations and sectors. While studies into volunteering abound, volunteering theory remains fragmented, with limited integration and successful application of theory across multiple contexts (Hustinx et al., 2010). Furthermore, volunteering in sports clubs represents a potentially distinctive context. Doherty (2013) has articulated the requirement for sport researchers to consider whether there is need for more indigenous theory in the field of sport management. It is, therefore, beneficial to consider sports club volunteering it its natural setting and ensure that theory is relevant to the context. In this regard, constructivist grounded theory method is useful as it encourages the researcher to develop a deep understanding of context and how situational conditions influence participant experience (Charmaz, 2014).

Since golf clubs have received limited research attention, and because golf club volunteers have not previously been researched, it was appropriate to allow space to orientate this study towards the most productive lines of inquiry. In this regard, the grounded theory method allows research to develop in the field (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). With the grounded theory method, as data is analysed and theory constructed, more informed decisions can be made about productive lines of enquiry. Theoretical sampling is particularly helpful as it allows the researcher to investigate concepts that might not be apparent at the start of the study. The evolving nature of grounded theory research means that it is a particularly effective approach for an exploratory study.

Constructivist grounded theory is also well-suited to the study of sociological social psychology processes, whereby process involves changes in people's action and understanding (Charmaz, 2014). Indeed, the original version of grounded theory emphasised the analysis of action and process (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Since this research is concerned with how social context and social interactions influence the development of volunteers' feelings towards their golf club, it is essentially a sociological social psychology study (Kalkhoff, 2007). Furthermore, as set out in section 2.4 of the literature review, the study uses the volunteer process model as a useful tool for organising the

antecedents, experience and consequences of volunteering (Snyder and Omoto, 2008). This model emphasises the understanding of volunteer action through three stages of volunteering. Constructivist grounded theory provides a suitable means to document and understand this process, including what happens, when it occurs and how it occurs (Charmaz, 2014).

Another key strength of the grounded theory method is its systematic approach and its capacity to demonstrate methodological rigour (Urquhart, 2013). On starting this research, it was apparent that a large amount of qualitative data would be collected. In such instances, having explicit methodological guidance provides the researcher with a helpful pathway (Charmaz, 2014). Furthermore, the systematic nature of grounded theory means that it generates a robust chain of evidence to support theory constructions (Urquhart, 2013). Theory is grounded in the data and rests securely on top of a body of evidence. Thus, the systematic nature of the grounded theory method provides a sound evidence base to support knowledge claims.

In choosing a research approach, it is worth being aware of potential methodological shortcomings. Indeed, there is a common critique of the grounded theory method, which argues that resultant theories are just substantive, too detailed, at too low a level and merely state the obvious (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2018). Layder (1998, in Urquhart, 2013) described such theories as micro-phenomena and questioned their utility. Following this argument, there is a risk that the theory constructed through this study will merely say something about a narrow range of golf clubs and their volunteers, thereby placing limits on its usefulness. However, these criticisms presume that grounded theorists fail to apply abstract analysis. In actuality, the grounded theory method encourages a conceptual rendering of data. Therefore, while the constructivist grounded theorist must be suitably cautious in limiting knowledge claims to the substantive context, that does not necessarily mean the conceptual account cannot subsequently resonate in other contexts.

The interpretive researcher must also be aware that the grounded theory method can create tension between abstract conceptualisation and maintaining the meanings that participants revealed in their accounts (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2018). Through the detailed coding of data and abstraction, there is a risk that the narrative flow and emotional content of data are lost, and that research findings begin to lose contact with their context. To guard against this, the researcher must remain mindful of context and constantly compare data to theory. In the reporting of research, the use of rich narrative data to illustrate theoretical concepts should demonstrate substantive fit and show that conceptualisations remain in touch with the underlying empirical evidence (Charmaz, 2014).

3.8 Data collection strategy

3.8.1 Theoretical sampling

In grounded theory studies, researchers use theoretical sampling to make choices about what data to collect. Indeed, theoretical sampling has always been a pivotal strategy in the grounded theory method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Theoretical sampling aims to develop a better understanding of conceptual categories, seeking out data to either confirm, clarify or expand them (Charmaz, 2014). This represents a systematic process for the collection of data, with decisions made on analytic grounds (Urquhart, 2013). The use of theoretical sampling in this way helps to develop conceptually dense theory. Inadequate sampling is likely to result in a thin and poorly integrated theory that has too many unexplained exceptions (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

Theoretical sampling requires the researcher to seek out theoretically relevant 'slices of data' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 65). This is consistent with the general approach of qualitative research that pursues the most revealing cases for investigation (Creswell, 2013). The collection of multiple case data enables the researcher to consider how individuals' action, behaviour and thoughts vary across different situations. Thus, through theoretical sampling and the

construction of theory, it is possible to explore similarities and variation in concepts across different conditions.

Data must be collected in phases to facilitate theoretical sampling. This allows the researcher to move iteratively between data gathering and data analysis. In this study, data was gathered across four phases to enable comparisons of organisational conditions and volunteer experience. By using theoretical sampling in this way to strategically collect slices of data for interrogation, it was possible to build theory (Urquhart, 2013). The following paragraphs go on to describe the theoretical sampling strategy used in this study. Table 5 then illustrates how the approach was applied in practice.

To engage in theoretical sampling, the researcher must develop some provisional conceptual categories. This is made possible by the first phase of data collection and analysis (Charmaz, 2014). As this study was concerned with the development of organisational commitment among volunteers, the research commenced in a golf club where volunteers displayed strong commitment. The club was also typical of many associational golf clubs, being relatively traditional with an older demographic. The collection and analysis of data from this club provided an opportunity to establish some basic analytical categories.

The first phase of data analysis was highly inductive. From this initial analysis, the researcher began to develop conceptual categories, which were then used to make future sampling decisions. Thus, the research started to utilise abductive reasoning to sample data as the study progressed. This is a common feature of the grounded theory method in which data collection cannot be planned ahead of the emerging theory because sampling is dependent on data analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

Further to collecting and analysing data from the first phase, this study deployed theoretical sampling in two main ways. Firstly, theoretical sampling

was used to actively pursue the collection of data to develop conceptual categories. Secondly, theoretical sampling was used to vary the organisational conditions and the characteristics of the volunteers to understand how concepts worked under different circumstances. In grounded theory terminology, these approaches would be described as 'considering the diversity or similarity of concepts' and 'minimising and maximising group differences' (Urquhart, 2019). Each approach is described in the following paragraphs.

In this study, the development of concepts was pursued by adaptations to the interview schedule and by actively seeking out instances of data relevant to a particular conceptual category. With regard to the former, interview schedules were amended four times throughout the study to facilitate the collection of data that was relevant to the theory under construction. This use of theoretical sampling to determine interview questions is covered in more detail in section 3.9.4 on semi-structured interviews.

The active pursuit of relevant data was used to saturate categories with instances of data. In grounded theory, saturation means that additional data no longer develops the properties of a category (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Unsaturated categories need more data to scope out their properties fully. Thus, by actively pursuing relevant data, it was possible to turn an unsaturated category into a saturated category. In this study, interesting and theoretically relevant categories were established in the areas of organisational socialisation, volunteer-member discussion and organisational commitment, and so additional data was specifically sought to explore these. Table 5 below highlights how golf clubs and interviewees were chosen to explore these conceptual areas.

In this study, group difference was investigated by carefully sampling golf clubs and volunteers for inclusion in the research. With regard to golf clubs, the researcher worked closely with England Golf to identify and select clubs. In the main, golf clubs were chosen because they were different from previously

studied clubs in some key respects. This allowed the researcher to gradually expand the range of organisational conditions under which the concepts could be considered. Thus, clubs were chosen because they would be significant for the theory under construction.

When choosing golf clubs to include in the study, a key consideration was the type of people that volunteered in them. This was because theoretical sampling was also used to select interviewees. Throughout the study, theoretical sampling decisions took account of various volunteer characteristics, including gender, age, employment status, playing biography and length of club membership. At various junctures, each characteristic was targeted to understand whether volunteer experiences were similar or different. The researcher worked closely with the general manager or a senior volunteer within the club to identify and invite volunteers to interview.

When sampling interviewees, it was not always easy to identify and recruit participants to meet the sampling criteria. At all four golf clubs, it proved difficult to find volunteers aged under 55 years and in full-time work to participate in semi-structured interviews. In part, this was because there were relatively few of them. It was also because younger volunteers often declined to be interviewed as they did not have the spare time to participate. By the end of phase 3, it remained unclear whether the theory under construction adequately captured the experience of younger adult volunteers. The possibility that younger adult volunteers had different experiences to older volunteers had not been discounted. This was an important issue to resolve because, as set out in the introduction in section 1.2 of chapter 1, it is unclear whether younger generations develop organisational commitments to voluntary sports clubs in the same way as older people. Thus, in the final phase of data collection, the researcher selected volunteers aged under 55 years from across England for interview. To recruit volunteers for an interview in phase 4, England Golf promoted the opportunity to participate in a research interview through their Club Support Network and on social media. This yielded 7 interviewees aged

under 55 years and in full-time employment from associational golf clubs across England.

Overall, the theoretical sampling process was complicated. The selection of golf clubs and interviewees involved consideration of multiple conceptual and situational conditions. Table 5 illustrates the application of theoretical sampling in this study across four phases.

Table 5 - Application of theoretical sampling in this study

Phase 1
Club A Club A was chosen as it offered a rich case where the phenomena of organisational commitment appeared to be strongly present among volunteers. The club provided an opportunity to establish some basic analytical categories. Characteristics of the club that made it a good first choice included: • Typical of an associational golf club with a long history and traditional outlook. • Impressive contribution and commitment from volunteers – e.g. extensive volunteering for the open competitions hosted by the club. • Volunteers were mostly aged over 60 years and retired, and therefore typical of most golf club volunteers.

Phase 2	
Club B Group difference: • Club B shared club A's long history and tradition. • However, club B extended group difference because it was struggling and was not located in an affluent area. The club was finding it difficult to recruit and retain volunteers. • The club also provided opportunities to maximise the difference in volunteer characteristics since there were several prominent and long-standing female volunteers.	Club C Group difference: • Club C lacked the long histories of clubs A and B. The club had less entrenched behavioural norms and was comparatively informal. This made club C a potentially revelatory case. • The club included volunteers who had first taken up golf as adults, which provided opportunities to maximise difference among volunteers studied.

Conceptual development:	Conceptual development:
• There was some discord among members and volunteers. This facilitated the investigation of discord as a feature within the volunteer-member discussions.	• The club had several volunteers who had taken up golf as adults. This provided opportunities to explore volunteer socialisation in rich detail since their golf club socialisation experiences were more recent.

Phase 3
Club D

Group difference:
• The club had several volunteers who had comparatively short playing and membership histories. Although similar volunteers had been found in club C, club D provided the opportunity to further explore their experience inside a relatively traditional golf club.

Conceptual development:
• Club D had several volunteers who had taken up golf as adults and had comparatively short membership and volunteering histories at the club. This facilitated the collection of data to explore the process of socialisation within a traditional club.
• The club's membership included both 'traditionalist' and 'relaxed' older members. The club was also slowly changing. This provided an opportunity to explore the dynamics of organisational change within volunteer-member discussions. |

Phase 4
E – Younger adult volunteers from a range of different clubs

The final phase was mostly concerned with maximising group difference. The decision to sample younger adult volunteers was made to see whether and how concepts constructed during phases 1 to 3 applied to younger adult volunteers that were in full-time work. The sampling of volunteers from a range of golf clubs also helped to explore whether constructed concepts were relevant across a range of different club contexts. |

3.8.2   Theoretical saturation

By the end of phase 4, data collection was no longer yielding new analytical insights. The data was simply producing more data for existing codes and no new codes were being created. In grounded theory, this is generally referred to as 'theoretical saturation', representing the point when gathering more data fails to generate any more theoretical insights (Urquhart, 2013; Charmaz, 2014). Therefore, after the seventh interview in phase 4, data collection ended. Overall, the period of data collection spanned 20 months, starting in May 2018 and ending in December 2019, and covered 28 interviews in total.

3.8.3   Summary analysis of sampled golf clubs and interviewees

Table 6 below provides a brief summary of the golf clubs included in this study. Tables 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11 then summarise the characteristics of volunteers interviewed in this study. More detailed descriptions of the golf clubs are provided later in section 4.5 of Chapter 4, which aims to provide organisational context for the findings presented in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

Table 6 - Summary of associational golf clubs included in this study

	Club A	Club B	Club C	Club D
Location	Southern England	Northern England	Midlands	Northern England
History	100+ years	100+ years	Less than 30 years	100+ years
Internal structure	- Board - Sections	- Council (large) - Sub-committees - Sections	- Board - Sections	- Board - Sub-committees - Sections
Strategic orientation	Aim to be a top-end club with excellent facilities.	Lacking strategic direction and struggling.	Lower/mid-market position and accessible. Improving.	Mid-market, providing a quality experience at a reasonable cost.
Full annual members fee (nearest '000)	£1,600	£600	£600	£700
Demographics	Located in affluent suburban area. Members typically older, from higher socio-economic groups.	Located in a town with significant areas of deprivation. Small membership, typically from middle to lower socio-economic groups.	Located on the edge of a relatively prosperous market town. Members from a diverse range of socio-economic groups.	Located in a town with distinct areas of prosperity and deprivation. Members from middle to higher socio-economic groups.
Club culture	Traditional but not stuffy. Becoming more relaxed.	Traditional practices. Tight-knit core community.	Relaxed. Comparatively few traditional practices.	Traditional, although gradually relaxing formal practices.

Table 7 - Analysis of interviewees by gender

	Club A	Club B	Club C	Club D	Other	Total	Per cent
Male	4	1	5	3	6	19	68%
Female	2	3	2	1	1	9	32%
Total	**6**	**4**	**7**	**4**	**7**	**28**	**100%**

Table 8 - Analysis of interviewees by age

Age	Club A	Club B	Club C	Club D	Other	Total	Per cent
20-30	-	1	-	-	1	2	7%
30-40	1	-	-	-	4	5	18%
40-50	-	-	1	-	1	2	7%
50-60	-	-	3	-	1	4	14%
60+	5	3	3	4	-	15	54%
Total	**6**	**4**	**7**	**4**	**7**	**28**	**100%**

Table 9 - Analysis of interviewees by employment status

Employment status	Club A	Club B	Club C	Club D	Other	Total	Per cent
Full-time	1	1	2	-	7	11	39%
Part-time	1	-	-	1	-	2	7%
Retired	4	3	5	3	-	15	54%
Total	**6**	**4**	**7**	**4**	**7**	**28**	**100%**

Table 10 - Analysis of interviewees by playing biography

Playing biography	Club A	Club B	Club C	Club D	Other	Total	Per cent
Continuous since a junior	1	3	-	-	4	8	29%
Started as junior, stopped but returned as adult	3	1	2	-	3	9	32%
Learnt to play as adult	2	-	5	4	-	11	39%
Total	**6**	**4**	**7**	**4**	**7**	**28**	**100%**

Table 11 - Analysis of interviewees by length of club membership

Length of membership	Club A	Club B	Club C	Club D	Other	Total	Per cent
Less than 5 years	1	-	-	-	2	3	11%
5-10 years	2	-	3	4	1	10	35%
11-20 years	2	1	3	-	1	7	25%
More than 20 years	1	3	1	-	3	8	29%
Total	**6**	**4**	**7**	**4**	**7**	**28**	**100%**

3.9 Data collection methods

3.9.1 Gathering rich data

Rich data provides the foundation for high quality and credible grounded theories (Charmaz, 2014). In interpretive research, gathering rich qualitative data enables the researcher to enter the research participants' world. For this study, it was essential to collect data about the golf club settings and volunteers' experience within them. The data collection methods had to allow the researcher to delve beneath surface representations and reveal deeper meanings. Several data collection methods were, therefore, used in this study, including observation, document analysis and semi-structured interviews. Each data collection method is described below.

3.9.2 Observation

Observation is a common qualitative data collection method that involves the researcher entering the field to observe people's behaviour and listen to what is said (Bryman, 2008). A key strength of observation is the collection of data in 'natural' settings, thereby preserving as much of the everyday milieu as possible (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). In this study, observation was principally used to collect data on organisational context. By spending time in golf clubs, the researcher developed a deeper understanding of golf club life. The presence of the researcher allowed the researcher to develop relationships inside the golf

club and build trust. Being present also provided occasional opportunities to observe volunteers actively performing their role.

Researchers that engage in observation must consider what impact their presence has on the behaviour of research participants and the extent to which the natural setting can be preserved (Bryman, 2008). In particular, the researcher must decide whether to take an active or passive role. Role types have been variously categorised (Gold, 1958; Gans, 1968; Adler and Adler, 1987), but essentially range from the highly involved participant to the detached non-participating observer. Choices revolve around the desirability and feasibility of the researcher remaining detached and objective, or whether a more participatory role will uncover greater understanding and meaning. In this study, as shall be described below, the researcher occasionally assumed a more participatory role but, on the whole, remained detached.

Early in the study, when the researcher was new to golf, the researcher sought to rapidly familiarise himself with the social world of the golf club. In the early stages of the study, the researcher made efforts to play golf. The researcher attended a short 6-week course of group lessons and visited a driving range to practice. Having reached a reasonable standard, the researcher played golf at several different courses. These experiences helped the researcher familiarise himself with playing golf and golf clubs. These familiarisation experiences proved useful later in the study when performing interviews, as it allowed the researcher to engage with golf club volunteers on their terms and talk to them knowledgeably about their passion for golf. At the same time, it became apparent that time spent out on the golf course did not yield much useful data about volunteers. Time spent in and around the clubhouse yielded more data and so this is where observational efforts were concentrated.

The researcher took opportunities to interact and collaborate with participants to develop researcher understanding and yield insider accounts (Angrosimo and Mays de Perez, 2000). At Club A, in particular, the researcher participated

alongside club volunteers in running open competitions at the golf club. Across two full days, the researcher performed various functions alongside experienced club volunteers, including registering players, ball-spotting, collecting scorecards and entering scores into the database. This provided the opportunity to observe volunteers in action. It also offered the chance to speak informally with a range of different golf club volunteers. However, as the study progressed to other golf clubs, it became apparent that Club A was unusual in hosting prestigious open competitions. Other golf clubs did not utilise volunteers in the same way.

With limited opportunities to actively participate alongside golf club volunteers, the researcher mostly took a passive observer role during the study. Observations focussed on the wider social context of the golf clubs. The researcher spent time in and around the clubhouse, which was where most social interactions occurred. The researcher's presence in the golf club was justified by attending meetings to arrange access and set up interviews, and then to conduct the interviews. By arriving early for appointments, and by staying for food or drink in the clubhouse afterwards, the researcher had plenty of observation time.

Since observations are subject to researcher interpretation (Bryman, 2008), the researcher took steps to guard against researcher pre-conceptions. The researcher recorded as much detail as possible in the field notes to avoid premature theoretical abstraction and to allow unexpected findings to emerge from the data (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). The researcher recorded observations in note form using pen and paper and subsequently wrote these up in the electronic form. Wherever possible, notes were recorded and typed up the same day. Across the study, the researcher recorded 42 pages of typed observation notes.

3.9.3 Documents

Documents provide another valuable source of information for grounded theory studies (Charmaz, 2014). In this study, documents provided a source of information about the broad context of the golf industry and golf clubs in general. Industry documents included reports and operational guidance for golf clubs produced by England Golf. Documents were also obtained from other industry bodies such as the R&A which governs the sport internationally, the Professional Golfers Association (PGA) which represents the interests of teaching and club golf professionals, and the Golf Club Managers Association (GCMA).

Documents also provided a source of information about the golf clubs included in the study. Golf club documents included websites, social media, new member welcome packs, newsletters, photographs, notices, posters displayed on club notice boards and annual accounts. Furthermore, with the cooperation of each golf club, England Golf produced an 'Understand Your Market' report. These reports provided a review of each club's membership by age, gender and residential location. They also offered an analysis of each club's membership according to nine marketing categories devised by England Golf. These categories had been developed by England Golf based on extensive market research. Categories included 'older traditionalist', 'late enthusiast', 'relaxed member', 'younger traditionalist', 'younger fanatics', 'younger actives', 'occasional time pressed', 'social couples' and 'casual fun'. A profile of the typical golfer for each category is provided. Although the analysis is limited by its reliance on residential post-codes and geo-demographic profiling, the Understand Your Market reports were useful in providing a broad understanding of the social profile of the membership at each club. They are used in the description of the golf clubs in section 4.5 of Chapter 4.

3.9.4 Semi-structured interviews

While observation and documents provided valuable information on the golf club context and some insight into the role of volunteers, in-depth semi-structured interviews with golf club volunteers generated the most data for this study. The central role of semi-structured interviews is typical of grounded theory studies because interviews allow the researcher to pursue topics relevant to the study and about which interviewees have extensive experience (Charmaz, 2014).

Interviews provide an opportunity for interviewees to put forward and develop their point of view. Often, the narratives that interviewees provide are retrospective accounts, whereby they present a performance about past actions and meanings (Atkinson and Silverman, 1997). For the constructivist researcher, the subjectivity of an interviewee's account is of particular interest (Charmaz, 2014). It provides an opportunity for the interviewer to respond to what the participant is saying and explore the interviewee's construction of meaning (Gubrium and Holstein, 2012). As a result, critical actions and meanings are thoroughly discussed, which yields rich and detailed data.

In accordance with the constructivist grounded theory method, the interview schedules used in this study were lightly structured (Charmaz, 2014). The researcher started interviews by asking volunteers how they began playing golf, how they came to join their current golf club and their early experiences as a member. The interview schedule then moved on to question how interviewees became volunteers and what volunteer roles they filled. The interview covered interviewees' experience as a volunteer and addressed how volunteers felt about their golf club. Open questions were used throughout the interview to allow participants to raise relevant issues that may not have been considered by the researcher. Overall, the in-depth interviews sought to explore golf club volunteers' personal experience, perspectives and meanings in a gently guided conversation.

In accordance with theoretical sampling, the interview schedule was modified during the research process. Although the basic structure and questions remained the same throughout, some questions were added or amended to solicit data on specific conceptual categories. Modifications were made between each of the four phases of the research. Changes included new questions on: integration into the golf club; the decision to volunteer; involvement in organisational debates; perceptions about how other members valued volunteer contributions; and, how feelings towards the golf club changed as a result of volunteering

In conducting the interviews, the researcher sought to build rapport with interviewees. The researcher tended to chat informally with the interviewee beforehand, often while ordering some drinks from the bar. While a couple of interviewees appeared to approach the process as a public relations performance, seemingly concerned that their role as a volunteer and their golf club should be represented in a positive light, this was unusual. Even when interviewees were initially restrained, the rhythm of the interview eased them in gently, with initial questions on playing golf and their history of club membership. It was, therefore, possible to build rapport and trust with interviewees.

All semi-structured interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of each interviewee. All recordings were then transcribed. Recognising that the use of transcription may constrain interpretations of the data (Lapadat and Lindsay, 1999), the researcher transcribed all interviews himself by listening to the recording. The researcher also made the transcriptions immediately before coding the data. This process ensured that the transcribed words did not become detached from the audio. The researcher thereby remained familiar with contextual factors, tone and speech patterns.

A total of 28 semi-structured interviews were conducted as part of this study. The typical length of an interview was between 45 and 60 minutes. Several interviews ran for as long as 90 minutes. The shortest interview lasted 35 minutes. Altogether, the interviews yielded 389 A4 pages of single-spaced typed text.

3.10 Data coding and analysis

3.10.1 Initial coding, focussed coding and constant comparison

This study used coding techniques to make sense of the data collected. All observation notes and interview transcripts were all coded. Golf club documents were also coded, although they tended to say little about the experiences of volunteers and were, therefore, mostly used to provide context for understanding the volunteers' experiences. For this reason, documents are mostly used in Chapter 4 to describe the context of golf volunteering, whereas examples of coded data that relate to volunteers' experiences appear in the findings in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

Coding involves the researcher defining what is happening in the data and attaching conceptual labels to data (Urquhart, 2013). As recommended by the constructivist strand of the grounded theory method (Charmaz, 2014), this study used the coding practices of initial and focussed coding. These coding practices are very similar to the open and selective coding practices recommended by other strands (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Urquhart, 2013). The constructivist coding framework was found to be particularly effective at capturing the actions and meanings of research participants and preserving context.

The researcher used initial coding to break open the data. As per constructivist grounded theory guidance (Charmaz, 2014), this meant working through the data and coding short textual passages. Data was coded quickly to inhibit premature over-analysis. Close attention was paid to the language used by

interviewees, with telling phrases incorporated into codes. This helped to preserve *in vivo* terms in the analysis. Gerunds were also extensively used when coding. Gerunds are verbs which function as a noun, usually ending '-ing', and are useful in capturing and preserving action in the data (Charmaz, 2014). Care was taken, however, not to force gerunds on the data (Bryant, 2017). When coding, the researcher remained familiar with the context of the textual passage, thereby allowing consideration of the situation. This avoided the fracturing of data, whereby coding separates statements from context (Charmaz, 2014).

The researcher used focussed coding to identify and select codes that demonstrated the most analytical strength (Charmaz, 2014). Focussed coding involved comparing initial codes to identify recurring and significant issues. Initial codes were grouped together and focussed codes created to contain them. Initial codes that encapsulated other codes were also raised to the status of focussed code. Thus, it is through focussed coding that categories are formed. An example of how initial codes were grouped together to form a focussed code is provided in Table 12.

Table 12 - Example of focussed coding

Focussed code	Initial codes

Pride in the golf club	• Proud of the club (course, members, achievements).
	 • Wanting others to perceive golf club positively.
	   ○ Wanting visitors to have a good experience.
	   ○ Enjoying positive feedback from visitors.
	   ○ Challenging negative perceptions about the golf club.
	 • Making positive comparisons to other golf clubs.
	 • Appreciating external recognition of the club.

As noted in section 3.5 above, constant comparison is a central feature of the grounded theory method. Constant comparison involves comparing instances of coded data to develop successively more abstract concepts. The process includes 'comparing data with data, data with code, code with code, code with category, category with category, and category with concept' (Charmaz, 2014: 344). By deploying constant comparison, the abstract labelling of data was

exposed to a thorough examination, thereby bringing rigour to study. Furthermore, by deploying constant comparison, the resulting concepts are supported by multiple instances from the data, as demonstrated in the findings sections below.

The researcher used NVivo version 11 software for all coding. The use of software enabled the researcher to quickly identify and access all examples of a given code. The use of software in this way greatly facilitated the process of constant comparison.

3.10.2 Building theory

As discussed in section 3.5 above, the grounded theory method aims to build theory, whereby theory provides an abstract rendering of the social world. It is important to recognise that there are different levels of theory. There is 'substantive theory', which is developed for the interpretation of the particular area of investigation (Charmaz, 2014; Urquhart, 2019). There is also 'formal theory', which is usually more abstract and cuts across several substantive areas cases (Charmaz, 2014; Urquhart, 2019). Theories will tend to sit on a spectrum between these two types, depending on their scope and conceptual level. A study such as this, that focusses on volunteers in English golf clubs, is substantive since it pertains to a substantive area and is limited by the scope of its empirical underpinnings. However, it is possible to enhance its formality and its transferability to other contexts by developing analytical rather than descriptive concepts (Urquhart, 2019).

The development of abstract theory necessitates establishing plausible relationships between categories formed through focussed coding. It is noteworthy, however, that grounded theory scholars contest the process by which categories are related to one another. Proposed methods of theory building include: theoretical coding (Glaser, 1978, 2005); drawing on the personal qualities and creativity of the researcher (Corbin and Strauss, 2008); harnessing the inner conversations of the researcher shaped by the research

context (Orland-Barak, 2002); and, abductive reasoning that draws on a researcher's broad theoretical knowledge (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012). To this list, we could add other methods of theorising used in sociological enquiry, including visual thinking, theorising through writing, using an instinctive 'sociological eye', imagination, and speculating with new ideas (Swedberg, 2016). While the theoretical coding proposed by Glaser represents the most established method for building theory in grounded theory studies, '*constructing theory is not a mechanical process*' (Charmaz, 2014: 245). Since this research adopts a constructivist stance, it has been possible to utilise a range of theory-building techniques. This section, therefore, describes the various methods used to construct theory in this study. These methods included theoretical coding, memo-writing, researcher creativity and co-construction.

Grounded theorists typically use theoretical coding as a final coding step to develop plausible relationships between categories and thus build theory (Urquhart, 2013; Charmaz, 2014). Proponents of classic grounded theory method tend to favour the use of theoretical coding families for theoretical coding (Glaser, 1978, 2005). These coding families are loose frameworks of general concepts designed to support the development of theory from the data. They are useful in generating ideas about how categories relate to one another. Indeed, the coding families were used in this study to consider possible theoretical relationships, not least because, as a novice sociologist, the researcher had limited theoretical knowledge. However, the researcher was also conscious not to rely too heavily on Glaser's theoretical codes. Charmaz (2014) has argued that Glaser's coding families tend to draw on positivist theories, thereby leaving some conceptual families from his lists. Furthermore, there is a risk of forcing theoretical codes on data, which Glaser himself warns against (Glaser and Holton, 2005). As such, the researcher did not mechanically apply Glaser's theoretical codes, but used them as a tool to explore possible relationships, thereby leaving space for the construction of the most analytically useful theoretical codes.

Memo writing, in which the researcher breaks off from data analysis to record a theoretical memo, has always been an important tool for theory development within the grounded theory method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Urquhart, 2013; Charmaz, 2014). Memo-writing supports the analysis of data and aids the construction of theoretical relationships between categories. It is an activity that should be sustained throughout the research process. Accordingly, the researcher recorded theoretical ideas in written memos throughout the data analysis process. Indeed, the first memo was written in May 2018, soon after the first interview had been coded. Across the next two years, the researcher maintained a spontaneous approach to writing memos, recording them as and when new theoretical analysis came to mind. Across the research project, the researcher wrote 51 A4 pages of single-spaced typed memos. Several of these memos included tables and diagrams. As the study progressed, many of the memos inevitably became redundant. Indeed, by the time the study concluded, some of the early memos looked hopelessly naïve! Nevertheless, many of the theoretical memos proved useful and are integrated into the findings and discussion sections below.

The constructivist strand of grounded theory shares with many other approaches to sociological enquiry an acceptance that theory-building includes an element of creativity (Charmaz, 2014; Swedberg, 2016). A grounded theory study generates lots of coded data, and there are many different ways to include, combine and relate codes, or to ignore some of them. The inner thought processes that the researcher applies to the analysis are inevitably affected by the researcher's biography, values and ways of thinking. From a constructivist standpoint, the inner resources of the researcher are reasonably applied to theory building, as long as this is accompanied by reflexivity. To this end, section 3.11 includes a discussion of researcher reflexivity.

In developing theory from qualitative research, scholars have noted the utility of respondent validation (Bryman, 2008) or, as Charmaz (2014) calls it, member-checking. Member-checking involves the researcher corroborating findings by

confirming them with research participants. The member-checking process helps to ensure that research findings adequately reflect the perspectives of research participants. However, member-checking was not used in this study for two reasons. Firstly, member-checking was impracticable. Data had been collected at golf clubs distributed across a large geographical area. This created a lot of travel and arranging meetings with participants during their leisure time was often difficult. Member-checking would have made the amount of travel impracticable. Secondly, and perhaps more significantly, there were concerns that member-checking tends to elicit defensive reactions from participants (Bryman, 2008), which renders the process unproductive.

Nevertheless, the researcher was conscious that the process of theory construction risked being a solitary activity. As such, corroboration and critique were sought from well-informed people from within the world of golf. Research findings and tentative theoretical models were presented to several audiences towards the end of the study. Audiences included club support staff from England Golf and the England Golf Volunteer Advisory Group. Club support staff regularly interact with golf clubs and so have a good understanding of the golf club context and the role played by volunteers. Many of their day-to-day interactions are with golf club volunteers. The Volunteer Advisory Group comprises golf club volunteers that provide insight and feedback to England Golf on volunteer management matters. As such, the Volunteer Advisory Group was a particularly valuable forum of people who had lived experience of being a golf club volunteer and to whom study findings could be presented and subjected to scrutiny. While the responses from these sharing processes were overwhelmingly positive, they also provided helpful feedback, which led the researcher to reconsider aspects of the constructed theory.

Finally, in building theory, it is necessary to engage with literature and critically relate it to existing theories (Urquhart, 2013). In this regard, it is helpful if the theory is sufficiently abstract to aid comparison with existing theories. In this way, it becomes possible to assess whether and how the grounded theory

confirms or contradicts existing theory. The results of this task are presented in the discussion in chapter 8.

3.11 Reflexive practice

3.11.1 Introduction to reflexivity

Charmaz (2014) argues that researcher reflexivity is essential to the constructivist grounded theory method. This is consistent with constructivist epistemology that compels researchers to be reflexive about their actions and decisions (Lincoln et al., 2011). Indeed, this view is more widely shared by qualitative researchers who accept their active involvement in the collection and interpretation of data, although what constitutes reflexivity and how it should be practised remain contested (Finlay, 2002). From a constructivist perspective, it is possible to conceive of reflexivity as the process of critical self-reflection. Thus, reflexivity involves the researcher examining how their interests, positions and assumptions influenced the research and scrutinising their research decisions and interpretations (Charmaz, 2014). In performing such scrutiny, there is a risk that deconstructing researcher subjectivity descends into nihilism (Finlay, 2002). This risk can be avoided by balancing a realistic appraisal of researcher subjectivity with the need to present a plausible interpretive account of social phenomena. It is in this vein that we now consider the role of the researcher in this study of golf club volunteers.

Wilkinson's (1988) three forms of reflexivity are used below to reflect on the researcher's subjectivity in this study. These three forms of reflexivity are: personal, functional and disciplinary. Personal reflexivity helps the researcher to make visible their personal impact on the research process. Functional reflexivity considers the role of the researcher in performing the research. Disciplinary reflectivity examines the place and function of the study within disciplinary debates about theory and method.

Following academic conventions in sport management research, this thesis is written in the third person. However, this practice is temporarily abandoned for the following writing on reflexivity. Since reflexivity involves a discussion of the thought process of the author, it feels appropriate to write from a more personal perspective. Therefore, for the remainder of this section, I shall momentarily switch to writing in the first person.

3.11.2 Personal reflexivity

All researchers have biographies, pre-existing knowledge, values and personal interests. Rather than deny their existence, constructivist researchers are encouraged to be reflexive about what they bring to the research and how it affects the research (Charmaz, 2014). Personal reflexivity helps to achieve this, whereby the researcher makes visible their motivations, interests and attitudes (Wilkinson, 1988).

My motivation for researching golf club volunteers was an underlying interest in voluntary organisations and sport. These interests had formed through a career working in the voluntary sector and a long-standing interest in sports. It was because of this background that the PhD opportunity appealed to me when it was advertised in the summer of 2017.

I am not a golfer and, before this study, I was unfamiliar with golf clubs. This lack of direct involvement in the sport has given me an outsider's perspective. I lacked personal attachments to golf and so never felt the need to step back from them. Throughout the research, including a short-lived effort to play golf, I have always regarded myself as a curious bystander. While this may sound like an attempt to justify my objectivity as a researcher, this is not the case, nor would it be appropriate as a constructivist researcher. Rather, I say this because I felt my dispassionate independence left me a degree freer to interpret and represent the multiple voices of golf club volunteers. I also believe that it helped me to identify the normative behaviours and tacit assumptions of golf

club members which, although unremarkable to established golfers, appear unusual to newcomers.

Although generating a feeling of detachment, my unfamiliarity with golf also left me prone to prejudicial preconceptions about the sport. Golf retains a reputation as a sport for old white men. It is not uncommon to find negative perceptions of golf in the media. For example, one commentator recently claimed that golf courses are for 'rich people …. for men ….and that people who play golf are those who crave human warmth the least' (Williams, 2020). When agreeing to do the PhD, many family and friends expressed surprise that I was going to research golf, which they perceived to be 'elitist', 'snobby', 'stuffy' and 'behind the times'. Furthermore, my voluntary sector career had inspired a commitment to social justice, which did not seem to fit well with the exclusive nature of some golf clubs. I was conscious from the beginning that I might bring these preconceptions into the study.

The air of exclusivity that I had expected to find in golf clubs was surprisingly absent. My experience at Club A was particularly significant in deconstructing stereotypical views. Club A's membership fees were substantial and the plush surroundings created a sense of exclusivity. And, yes, the car park invariably had a few fancy cars in it. However, this didn't translate into overt snobbishness among the members. The members and volunteers I met there were incredibly welcoming. They were content to let an outsider, like myself, help in the organisation of their open competitions. Moreover, they couldn't have been kinder and more willing to show me the ropes. Furthermore, the visiting golfers that I encountered at the open competitions were courteous, warm and friendly. Therefore, early on in my study, I quickly realised that the stereotypical golfer and golf club didn't exist, and that I would need to remain open to all possibilities when seeking to understand golf clubs and their volunteers.

Although I started the research with a naivety about golf clubs, after a period of intensive study and having some of my pre-conceptions overturned, I have

developed a good understanding of golfers, golf club volunteers and the rich culture of golf clubs. That said, even after two years of research, there is a risk that this study only partially reflects the viewpoints of golf club volunteers because I have not fully understood their context and their perspectives. On balance, however, I can reflect upon my dispassionate positioning and how this left me open to hearing all voices.

3.11.3 Functional reflexivity

Functional reflexivity requires researchers to considers their role in the research (Wilkinson, 1988). This includes researchers reflecting on their actions and decisions and their interactions with research participants. In this study, I have been conscious of how my sponsorship by England Golf has affected the research. I have also reflected on how I present myself when collecting data and how this affects the data collected. Furthermore, I have thought carefully about how I bring coherence to the research findings. I shall briefly discuss these matters below.

My PhD has been funded England Golf and I have often reflected on how this has affected my study. The support of England Golf has undoubtedly been of benefit to the research. England Golf was incredibly helpful in providing me with information and resources about golf clubs. The organisation's national network of club support staff helped me to identify golf clubs that met my theoretical sampling criteria and helped to negotiate access. It seems likely that their support was a factor in clubs and their volunteers agreeing to participate in the study. Having the backing of England Golf must have enhanced my credibility with clubs. The interest taken by England Golf staff and advisory groups in my research findings has also enabled me to obtain feedback on my theoretical ideas.

I am, nevertheless, conscious that England Golf are not a dispassionate stakeholder in my research. While England Golf has always appeared genuinely interested in discovering an authentic view of golf club volunteering, I have also

been aware that they are duty-bound to promote the sport's reputation, including the reputation of golf clubs. While that could be a constraint on the research, I have never felt compromised, mainly because I have found golf clubs to be convivial places. Of course, I recognise that in the process of selecting golf clubs, England Golf probably exerted some control, steering me towards good clubs or, at least, clubs that their regional staff had relationships with. It is noteworthy, however, that one of the clubs was specifically chosen because it was struggling. Furthermore, in the final phase of research, I recruited research participants with limited England Golf involvement and the findings from these interviews presented a similar picture to what I had found in the four golf clubs. In presenting findings, while conscious of how England Golf may view findings, I have been more preoccupied to portray the research participants' experiences and perspectives honestly and faithfully. Perhaps I am fortunate in never feeling conflicted by these two forces.

Researcher control of research topics and the collection of data is a common issue in researcher reflexively (Finlay, 2002). Researchers often consider how their control creates an imbalance of power between themselves and research participants. Throughout the fieldwork, I was conscious of the power that I possessed, primarily through my control of the interview process. I felt this more acutely when interviewing lower status volunteers, who tended to be less forthright in questioning my intentions. Conversely, I also felt that my lack of familiarity with golf clubs reduced power imbalances. Indeed, early in the research, I felt some trepidation stepping into the golf club environment, fearful of unwittingly breaking club rules or misunderstanding what research participants were telling me. I usually told interviewees that I was not a golfer, thereby ensuring that I did not embarrass myself by claiming knowledge that I didn't possess. I readily admitted that the golf club environment was new to me. This approach worked well as it tended to encourage a supportive stance from interviewees. Furthermore, by revealing the limitations of my knowledge, it appeared to put interviewees at ease. It may also have encouraged some interviewees to share their vulnerabilities as golf club volunteers. Those

interviewees that shared their vulnerability tended to yield the most interesting insights into the volunteer experience.

Three interviews with high-status individuals proved more challenging. These interviewees were all with male volunteers who had successful careers in private businesses or the public sector. Two of them also held senior volunteer roles in their golf club. During the interviews, these participants tended to express their opinions on how golf clubs should be managed. They seemed less willing to reveal their innermost thoughts and feelings about their volunteer experience. I found these interviews the hardest to navigate. For example, an uncomfortable moment arose with one authoritative interviewee when, in response to a question that probed how they felt as a volunteer, they exclaimed: '*I think that's a strange question*'. I was left temporarily scrambling to explain the reason for asking the question, but it was clear that pursuing any sort of vulnerability was off-limits. Rather than revealing my own weaknesses, I tended to compensate for my lack of familiarity by drawing on my past managerial career and present myself as an experienced professional. This led me to claim an authority that, in hindsight, I may have been better to ignore. Interviews of this nature tended to be the most disappointing because the discourse revealed less personal reflection. The interviewees and I may have been mutually complicit in refusing to acknowledge vulnerability. On reflection, perhaps if I had shown greater vulnerability, this may have encouraged authoritative interviewees to reveal more of themselves.

What seems clear from reflecting on my interviewing experiences is that I presented different versions of myself, depending on who I interviewed. While this performative aspect of research interviews is well established (Denzin, 2001), it nevertheless comes as a salutary reminder that data collection is a construction of the researcher. It is plausible to presume that different presentations of myself during interviews may have yielded different data.

Another key reflection arises from my authorship of this thesis. Authorship includes both the writing of the PhD thesis and being accountable for its content. In the classic grounded theory method, Glaser and Strauss (1967) envisage researchers producing conceptual analysis with authority. Throughout this study, I have often felt the urge to produce coherent analysis and findings. At the same time, I have taken seriously the responsibility for presenting an interpretive account that respects the experience of every golf club volunteer that participated in the research. While coherence aids comprehension, it also puts at risk ambiguity and variation in perspective. I recognise that the analysis is my construction and I worry that research participants - should they ever read it - will regard my account as having failed to capture their perspective. That is not to say that my constructive input makes the analysis hopelessly subjective and redundant. It is simply my reflection of the difficulties inherent in striking the right balance between rendering an intelligible interpretation of the experience of golf club volunteers and retaining the full diversity of research participants' perspectives.

3.11.4 Disciplinary reflexivity

Disciplinary reflexivity encourages researchers to think about how their research relates to disciplinary debates about theory and method (Wilkinson, 1988). For a novice researcher, there are considerable challenges associated with positioning oneself in relation to academic disciplines. In this study, since volunteering is multidisciplinary, I could choose from a wide array of perspectives. In the end, I found a sociological social-psychology perspective that concentrated on social interaction worked well. However, this choice of perspective was not easy, not least because I was continually considering the merits of a feminist perspective.

There are multiple studies of the golf industry from a feminist perspective (Hundley, 2004; McGinnis et al., 2005, 2009; Reis and Correia, 2013; Mitchell et al., 2016). These studies provided evidence that women are often subordinated in golf clubs, albeit some of these studies are from overseas and some are now

dated. Although setting aside this literature, I was aware of its presence. With feminism prominent among sociological studies of golf, I often pondered whether my study should also prioritise gender within my analysis of golf club volunteering. As a white middle-class male researcher, I contemplated whether I was sufficiently alert to the gender issues within golf clubs. Even though I sampled a relatively high proportion of female volunteers for interview and thought carefully about gender in my analysis, I always questioned whether I was adequately seeing and portraying important gender dimensions. Aspects of gender appeared in the data and are included in my analysis, but I never interpreted gender as being the fundamental concern of volunteers. Gender didn't seem to be a central defining feature of volunteer life. In particular, in my interviews with female volunteers, although gender issues arose, I didn't perceive that gender dominated their experience. Thus, gender never became central to my analysis. I fear that others may expect a more gendered account of the social world of golf clubs than I present below. They may attribute my largely ungendered analysis to my own positionality as a white middle-class male. In reflecting on this, I can at least say that I seriously considered gender aspects.

3.11.5 Summary of reflexive practice

In summary, by recounting key aspects of my reflexive practice during the study I am reminded that the findings presented in this thesis are inevitably an incomplete account of golf club volunteers. The account cannot be entirely detached from my own perspectives. It is dependent on the experience I had as a researcher and the role I played in collecting and analysing data. Nevertheless, reflexivity also reminds me that the findings presented below are a conscientious effort to say something coherent about the experience of volunteers in English golf clubs. I am satisfied that the findings preserve, as much as possible, the multiple voices that contributed to this study.

3.12 Evaluating methodological rigour

While the quality of research is ultimately judged by the quality of the research product (Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Charmaz, 2014), it is helpful to set out how this study meets accepted standards of methodological rigour. In choosing appropriate standards, it is reasonable that evaluations use criteria consistent with the research's own logic of inquiry (Madill et al., 2000). Therefore, since this study is positioned as constructivist research, it is appropriate to use evaluation criteria consistent with the constructivist paradigm.

Charmaz (2014) suggests credibility, originality, resonance and usefulness as criteria suitable for the assessment of constructivist grounded theory research. However, Charmaz only presents the criteria briefly and does not provide extensive guidance on how to use them. As Corbin and Strauss (2008) have pointed out, Charmaz's criteria also require a significant degree of subjective self-evaluation, which may not help researchers to evaluate their own work.

The criteria of trustworthiness and authenticity (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Guba and Lincoln, 1989) offer a more preferable means for assessing the methodological rigour of this study. These criteria have been widely used in the evaluation of qualitative research and are consistent with a constructivist epistemology. They allow for the possibility of several accounts of a phenomenon but ensure that research follows a rigorous process.

The criteria of trustworthiness has been widely used in social research (Bryman, 2008). Trustworthiness comprises four elements, including credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Guba and Lincoln, 1985). Table 13 below defines each requirement and describes the measures taken in this study to meet them.

Table 13 - Assessment of research trustworthiness

Criteria	Description of criteria	Measures taken in this study
Credibility	The extent to which the research findings are believable and accurately describe the studied phenomenon.	• The researcher spent significant time in the field and interviewed 28 golf club volunteers to obtain enough data. The data included multiple volunteer perspectives. • There is strong alignment between research participants' comments and the researcher's interpretations of them, as demonstrated by the extensive use of quotes in the reporting of findings. • The research analysis was corroborated by knowledgeable staff at England Golf and a Volunteer Advisory Group, who reviewed and commented on findings.
Transferability	Provide sufficient description of the research context and participants so that others can make judgments about the potential transferability of the findings to another context.	• The study establishes associational golf clubs as the clear organisational context for this study. • A substantial context section (chapter 4) allows readers to determine potential transferability to other contexts. • In the reporting of findings, descriptions of the relevant golf club context accompany quotes from research participants.
Dependability	Provide enough details about the methodology that would allow others to replicate the study and achieve similar results.	• The methodology is fully reported in chapter 3. The researched design is, therefore, transparent. • Thorough records were maintained throughout the study. All data was transcribed. All data coding was performed with NVivo software, thereby allowing full recovery of data to support analytical categories.
Confirmability	Claims made are supported by the data. The personal values and theoretical inclinations of the researcher should not unduly bias the research process and findings.	• Data analysis and findings are grounded in the perceptions of the research participants. This is demonstrated in the three research findings sections, which report multiple quotes from research participants. • The researcher has engaged in reflexivity to account for his subjective interpretation in the study. The researcher's values and interpretations can therefore be tracked.

In comparison to trustworthiness, Lincoln and Guba's (1989) authenticity criteria have not been as widely used in the assessment of qualitative research. However, the criteria are useful for research that has a practical focus (Bryman, 2008). Since this study aims to generate practical recommendations for the management of golf club volunteers, the authenticity criteria are considered relevant. The five authenticity criteria include fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity and tactical authenticity. Table 14 below defines each requirement and describes the measures taken in this study to meet them.

Table 14 - Assessment of research authenticity

Criteria	Description of criteria	Measures taken in this study
Fairness	The research should adequately represent the perspectives of all people being studied.	• The researcher spoke to a broad cross-section of golf club volunteers during the study. Details of volunteers sampled for interview are provided in section 3.8.3. • Opportunities to participate in the final phase of interviews were advertised openly. • The research findings incorporate the voices of all participants.
Ontological authenticity	The research should help people arrive at a better understanding of their social world.	• Research interviews provided the opportunity for participants to reflect on the nature of their experience as a golf club volunteer. Many interviewees said they enjoyed the interview and helped them to reflect on their experiences.
Educative authenticity	The research should help people to appreciate the perspectives of others within their social world.	• Research interviews provided the opportunity for participants to reflect on their relationships within the golf club and how they interacted with other people. This encouraged participants to consider other members' perspectives. • Research findings were presented to golf club managers at four regional online seminars, hosted by the Golf Club Managers Association in September 2020. This encouraged golf club managers to reflect on the perspectives of volunteers in golf clubs. • A short report on the research findings are due to be published by England Golf in

		January 2021. The report should help golf clubs and their multiple stakeholders better appreciate the experiences and perspectives of volunteers.
Catalytic authenticity	The research should encourage and stimulate stakeholders to take action.	• Research findings were presented to staff from England Golf's club support network during five regional online seminars in August 2020. Club Support Officers said that the research provided valuable insights and that the theoretical models presented would be prove useful tools when they were advising golf clubs. • After presenting research findings at four online seminars for the Golf Club Managers Association in September 2020, the golf club managers that attended were asked to provide their feedback. In session evaluation forms, golf club managers said that they would take action as a result of the session. For example, one attendee said '*we will improve our induction process*' and another said '*we will try to engage our membership more*'. • The reporting of research findings by England Golf in January 2021 should stimulate golf clubs to make changes to the way they recruit and retain volunteers.
Tactical authenticity	The research should empower stakeholders to act.	• After presenting research findings at online seminars hosted by the Golf Club Managers Association in September 2020, several golf club managers said that they would send the session slides to their board as they felt it would help them to make strategic changes. • The reporting of research findings by England Golf in January 2021 should provide golf clubs with evidence to enhance the support they provide to golf club volunteers.

3.13 Ethical considerations

In performing social research, researchers make judgments and take practical actions as they encounter ethical issues. It is crucial that researchers are conscious of these decisions and can justify them. This section, therefore, sets

out the ethical guideline and principles followed in this study. It covers both institutional ethics requirements and broader ethical principles.

For researchers, the first resource considered when making ethical decisions is typically their institutional or professional ethics codes (Kitchener and Kitchener, 2014). In this study, the ethical guidelines of Manchester Metropolitan University were applicable. These guidelines provided a set of principles and actions that were followed throughout the research.

In accordance with the university's ethical code, the researcher obtained ethical approval for the research in 2018. The request for ethical approval laid out the key ethical procedures to be applied in the study. In particular, all individuals invited to take part in the study were provided with a Participant Information Sheet that explained the research project. All participants were then asked to sign a Consent Form to confirm their understanding of the Participant Information Sheet and to obtain their informed consent. The Consent Form specifically asked participants to confirm their understanding that interviews would be audio-recorded and transcribed. The researcher implemented procedures to ensure that all research data, including the transcripts, were anonymised. Anonymity was further maintained in the writing up of this thesis and other associated reports.

In addition to following institutional ethical rules, Kitchener and Kitchener (2014) recommend that social researchers adopt higher-level ethical principles for their studies. They argue that ethical principles help researchers to evaluate their ethical dilemmas and make moral decisions. As such, this study was also guided by the five ethical principles set out in Table 15. The table provides details of how this study applied the ethical principles.

Table 15 - Ethical principles

Ethical principles (Kitchener & Kitchener, 2014)	How applied to this study
Nonmaleficence The researcher must not inflict harm on others. This includes neither inflicting intentional harm nor engaging in actions that risk harming research participants.	The research was assessed as being unlikely to cause harm to participants. Nevertheless, the researcher was alert to the risk that recalling past experiences could cause upset, especially those experiences that involved difficult situations and challenging relationships. The researcher adopted a sympathetic approach throughout all interviews.
Beneficence The research should do good or benefit others.	The research was designed to develop knowledge about golf club volunteers that supports practical recommendations to improve their experience.
Respect for persons Other people should be treated as autonomous individuals, having the freedom to act and make their own informed choices.	All individuals that participated in the research were assessed as being competent in making their own decisions. Research participants were provided with a Participation Information Sheet that described their involvement in the study. Participants were also given the opportunity to ask questions about the study. Informed consent was then obtained from all interviewees. The Participation Information Sheet informed participants that they could withdraw from the study, although none exercised this option.
Fidelity The relationship between researcher and research participants should be based around faithfulness, honesty and trust.	In obtaining informed consent, the researcher made undertakings to maintain participant anonymity and confidentiality. These assurances were maintained throughout the study. Importantly, since much of the research was conducted within organisational settings, care was taken to ensure that information disclosed to the researcher was not divulged to others within the organisation.
Justice Research should be fair. It should be inclusive and should not unfairly discriminate based on characteristics such as age, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, and so on.	The research sought out the experience and perspectives of all types of golf club volunteers, including women and younger adults. Thus, the research did not unduly favour the experience of older white males, who form the majority of golf club members and volunteers.

3.14 Methodology summary

This chapter has described and justified how constructivist grounded theory method has been used to address the research question posed in this study. Importantly, this chapter has shown how constructivist grounded theory ensures that the resulting findings rest firmly on the experiences of those golf club volunteers that participated in the study. Moreover, this chapter has shown how rich data can also be the inspiration for analytical insight. Thus, it is hoped that the findings reported in chapters 5, 6 and 7 blend compelling description and insightful analysis. Table 16 summarises the key features of the methodology followed in this PhD thesis.

Table 16 - Overview of the study's research design

	Position	**Justification**
Philosophical position	Constructivist paradigm	Lincoln et al. (2011)
Approach	Constructivist grounded theory method	Charmaz (2014)
Data collection strategy	Theoretical sampling	Charmaz (2014)
Data collection method	Documents Participant observation Semi-structured interviews	Charmaz (2014)
Data analysis	Initial, focussed and theoretical coding	Charmaz (2014)
Reflective practice	Personal, functional and disciplinary reflexivity	Wilkinson (1989)
Research evaluation	Trustworthiness and authenticity	Lincoln and Guba (1985) Guba and Lincoln (1989)
Ethics	Ethical rules and ethical principles	Kitchener & Kitchener (2014)

4 The Context of Golf Clubs

4.1 Introduction to the context of golf clubs

As the volunteer experience is dependent on the organisational context (Wilson, 2012), it is important to be clear what that context is. This chapter, therefore, provides the reader with an understanding of associational golf clubs, which form the substantive case for this thesis. Over the following pages, this chapter presents an overview of the golf industry before going on to describe different types of golf club. Key trends in the golf industry pertaining to golf clubs are discussed. The chapter then begins to focus on the case of English associational golf clubs. Since this thesis is concerned with volunteers in voluntary sports clubs, the choice of English associational golf clubs as the substantive case is justified by describing how they meet the definition of a voluntary sports club. A description of the golf clubs included in this study is then provided. By setting out the context in this way, the reader should be well-placed to assess whether this study's findings, as set out in chapters 5, 6 and 7, are reliable and trustworthy. By understanding the context, the reader will be able to judge for themselves what elements of the findings are transferrable to other contexts.

4.2 The golf industry and golf courses

Golf is a sport of global significance. Principally consumed through participation, purchasing equipment and spectating, its market size has been estimated at $84billion in the United States (Ozawa et al., 2018) and €13.5billion in Europe (Sports Marketing Surveys, 2013). In the UK, market size is estimated to be around £5bn (Sports Marketing Surveys, 2013; Sport Industry Research Centre, 2016), with England accounting for £3.2billion (Sports Marketing Surveys, 2014). Notwithstanding the methodological challenges of arriving at such figures, it is evident that golf represents a major sub-sector of the leisure industry.

In addition to its economic significance, golf also has substantial health and social impacts. Although playing golf carries some risk of injury (Cabri et al., 2009) and skin cancer (Hanke et al., 1985), research has generally shown that golf is an effective health-promoting activity and is associated with good physical health (Palank and Hargreaves Jr, 1990; Parkkari et al., 2000), positive mental health (Carless and Douglas, 2004) and increased life expectancy (Farahmand et al., 2009). A recent review of literature on the health impacts of golf concluded that golfers benefitted from substantial social, physical and mental health benefits (Murray et al., 2018).

Golf courses play a central role in providing opportunities to play golf. It is estimated that there are over 33,000 golf facilities worldwide, with just under half of these being in the United States and a quarter in Europe (R&A, 2017). England is the largest golfing market in Europe with almost 2,000 golf courses (R&A, 2017; KPMG, 2019). It is estimated that 60% of golf industry revenues in England flow into golf courses (Sports Marketing Surveys, 2014).

The golfing landscape in England comprises different types of golf clubs. Table 17 analyses the different types of golf clubs by ownership. It shows how associational clubs, which are also known as private members' clubs, account for the majority of golf courses in England. Proprietary golf courses, which are privately owned and managed to make a profit for their owners, make up just over a third. Municipal golf courses, which are typically owned by local authorities, make up less than a tenth of the English market. Finally, artisan clubs, in which members pay a lower membership fee in return for helping to maintain the parent club's course, are few in number.

Table 17 - Analysis of golf clubs affiliated to England Golf

(Source: England Golf database report as at September 2016)

Golf club type	Number	Percentage
Associational	1,019	51%
Proprietary	712	37%
Municipal	149	8%
Artisan	70	4%
Total	**1,950**	**100%**

The operating environment of golf clubs has shifted rapidly over the past 20 years. During the 1980s and 1990s, golf experienced substantial worldwide growth in participation (Stoddart, 2006). With a high demand for golf, there was an expansion in golf course supply, as private developers sought to profit from the game's popularity. New golf courses built in the UK during the last 15 years of the twentieth century covered an area the size of Greater Manchester (Nagle, 1999). However, this expansion in supply was ill-fated. From the mid-2000s, there was a downturn in golf participation in most western markets (KPMG, 2019). For example, in England, in the 10 years between 2006 and 2016, the number of adults regularly playing golf fell a quarter from 1.5million to 1.1million (Sport England, 2016a). For most golf clubs, decreasing participation has meant a sustained period of declining membership, which has only recently eased off (England Golf, 2018a).

As participation fell, growth gave way to static or, in some mature and developed markets, declining numbers of golf courses (KPMG, 2019). With supply outstripping demand, intense competition developed among golf clubs to attract golfers to their course. The golf market now includes large numbers of 'nomad' golfers who play itinerant golf at a range of different courses (Sports Marketing Surveys, 2014). Rather than paying an annual subscription to a single golf club, nomad golfers pay for each round of golf and benefit from low prices as clubs compete for their custom. In a competitive market place, golf club closures are now commonly reported (Bisset, 2019).

In the context of recent market conditions in golf, it is unsurprising that scholars have tended to focus on the management challenges facing golf clubs. Although research into golf clubs is surprisingly scarce, studies have investigated golf club marketing activities (Shaw and Alderson, 1995; Brooksbank et al., 2012), membership development (Ferreira and Gustafson, 2014) and performance management (Mort and Collins, 2001). These studies have encouraged golf clubs to adopt more strategic management practices to thrive in a competitive marketplace.

As the golf industry has sought to halt declining participation and find new members, the role of gender has become a feature of research into golf. Participation in golf is dominated by men, with females accounting for less than a quarter of golfers worldwide (Fry and Hall, 2018) and 17% of regular golfers in England (Sport England 2019). Various studies have looked at how gender influences social identities and culture within the sport (Hundley, 2004; McGinnis et al., 2005, 2009; Reis and Correia, 2013; Mitchell et al., 2016). These studies found that women frequently had negative gendered experiences inside golf clubs. With the sport's governing bodies recognising the enormous growth potential of women's golf, they are now making discernible efforts to promote female participation and improve their experience (Fry and Hall, 2018; Mackintosh and Mills, 2019). These efforts reflect the way the golf industry is trying to change to remain relevant and sustainable in today's society.

Golf's governing bodies are increasingly orientating their strategies to focus on modernising and improving people's experience of the game. After two decades of stagnant or declining participation, golf is making a concerted effort at '*turning around the sport*' (England Golf, 2017: 3). Prominent themes in the planned turnaround are: changing the public perception of golf (England Golf, 2017b); stabilising and growing participation (Syntenga UK, 2014; England Golf, 2017b); attracting more women and families to the game (Syntenga UK, 2014; England Golf, 2017b; Fry and Hall, 2018; R&A, 2019b); and, promoting the

physical and mental health benefits of golf (England Golf, 2017c; Murray et al., 2018). Since golf clubs play a central role in supplying golfing opportunities, significant efforts are also being made to improve club governance and performance (England Golf, 2019).

4.3   Associational golf clubs

As this thesis is concerned with volunteers in voluntary sports clubs, the focus of the research is on associational golf clubs. It is, therefore, important to be clear about how associational golf clubs meet the definition of a 'voluntary sports club', and how proprietary and municipal golf courses do not. In doing this, it should also be possible to illuminate some of the essential features of associational golf clubs.

Unhelpfully, all types of golf courses, regardless of ownership type, tend to call themselves a 'golf club'. Thus, the term 'club' is used ubiquitously to describe a golf course and its associated facilities. This doesn't help when trying to distinguish between golf clubs that can be defined as voluntary sports clubs and those that cannot. Therefore, to identify those members' clubs that meet the 'voluntary sports club' definition, this study uses the term 'associational golf club' to describe them. Table 18 sets out how associational golf clubs meet the requirements of the voluntary sports club definition. Accordingly, it can be confirmed that all golf clubs included in this study meet the definition of a voluntary sports club. Furthermore, all interviewees from the final phase of the research volunteered at golf clubs meeting the voluntary sports club definition.

Table 18 – How associational golf clubs meet the definition of voluntary sports clubs

Definition of a voluntary sports club (see section 2.2 above)	Associational golf clubs
The organisational purpose is to satisfy members' shared interest in a sport.	The purpose of associational golf clubs is to provide members with opportunities to play golf. The club's constitution will usually set out these organisational objectives (England Golf, 2019).
Democratic organisational constitution.	Associational golf clubs are governed by a constitution. These constitutions come in a variety of legal forms, including unincorporated associations, companies limited by guarantee, registered societies or incorporated charities (England Golf, 2019). Each club's constitution lays out rules for how it should be governed.
Membership is entirely voluntary.	Membership of associational golf clubs is entirely voluntary. There is no compulsion to be a member of a golf club.
Members act in a voluntary capacity.	While golf clubs typically employ staff in management, course maintenance, coaching and hospitality roles (Breitbarth et al., 2018), volunteers are active within associational golf clubs in a variety of different roles. Crucially, volunteers elected by their fellow members make up the governing body of associational golf clubs. Volunteers also serve on a range of different governance and operational sub-committees (England Golf, 2019). Furthermore, volunteers get involved in a range of non-committee roles such as as new member buddies (England Golf, 2020).
Self-governing independence.	Associational golf clubs typically own their own facilities (Sport and Recreation Alliance, 2016). The majority of associational golf club income is derived from memberships fees, with visitor green fees and clubhouse hire supplementing income (England Golf, 2018a). As such, golf clubs are not reliant on public sector funding or contracts. Furthermore, England Golf does not exert control over golf clubs. Rather, clubs tend to exert influence over the sport's governing body through the county golfing unions, which are the voting members of England Golf. Monies also flow from golf clubs to England Golf through the payment of member affiliation fees.
Non-profit: meaning no distribution of financial surpluses to members.	Associational golf clubs are not constituted to make a profit for their members. Where financial surpluses are generated, they are retained by the golf clubs. Surpluses are commonly used to invest in club facilities for the benefit of members (Hillier Hopkins LLP, 2019)

For the avoidance of doubt, this thesis is not concerned with volunteers in proprietary or municipal courses, where the golf club does not meet the definition of a voluntary sports club. While golfers that pay annual subscription fees to proprietary and municipal courses are often colloquially termed 'members', they do not democratically control their golf club. Control rests with the proprietor or the local authority. Furthermore, while 'club committees' are

sometimes embedded within proprietary and municipal courses, these committees are generally limited to the organisation of competitions and the administration of player handicaps. These committees do not have unfettered self-governing independence to pursue members' common interests because they are reliant on the owners of the golf course. The owners have the power to manage the facilities as they see fit.

To place associational golf clubs in context, their histories are briefly worth noting. The late nineteenth and early twentieth century were the key decades for the foundation of associational golf clubs in Britain (Lowerson, 1989). Although it is difficult to be certain of numbers, there were over a thousand golf clubs in Britain by 1914 (Lowerson, 1989; Holt, 1990). Many of these were formed by committees of moderately affluent middle-class men that had moved into new high-class suburban housing estates (Holt, 1990). The game of golf was attractive to the late Victorian middle classes who were increasingly concerned about physical health and virtuous self-improvement (Lowerson, 1989). These middle-class enthusiasts established many of the rules and practices of golf clubs, often with a view to creating and protecting exclusivity (Holt, 1990; Vamplew, 2010, 2016). Although there was further growth in associational golf clubs in the inter-war period, the rate of increase slowed (Lowerson, 1989). It is because of the early growth of golf in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that most associational golf clubs have histories dating back over 100 years, as evidenced by the preponderance of golf club centenary anniversary histories that have appeared over the past 30 years (Vamplew, 2010).

It has been argued that the associational nature of golf clubs, rooted as it was in the middle-class mentality and their ability to set their own rules, led many golf clubs to become bastions of snobbery in twentieth-century Britain (Hill, 2002). A concern for class and status infiltrated various aspect of golf club life, including the selective admission of new members, the appointment of the right kind of persons into governance roles and the maintenance of dress codes. That said,

the narrative of golf club history began to change towards the end of the twentieth century. Rapid changes in economy and society, combined with a popularisation of golf through television coverage, commercialism and the expansion of municipal and proprietary golf courses, meant that golf was arguably entering a new era (Lowerson, 1989; Holt, 1990; Stoddart, 2006). It is against this backdrop of rich history and a changing social and economic landscape that associational golf clubs exist today, and form a fertile context for sociological study.

4.4   Volunteers in associational golf clubs

'Committees' have been a feature of associational golf clubs for as long as they have existed (Holt, 1990). The involvement of members in the governance and management of associational golf clubs is, therefore, longstanding. As noted earlier in section 1.3 of chapter 1, it is estimated that there are currently around 40,000 to 50,000 volunteers in English associational golf clubs. Yet, academic research into the role of members in running their club is conspicuous by its absence. Our knowledge of golf club volunteerism in England is largely confined to what the sport's governing body, England Golf, has collated. In particular, a recent survey of golf club volunteers performed by England Golf (2017a) provides some useful information. Although the survey data is limited by its reliance on convenience sampling and a quarter of survey respondents being based in municipal and proprietary courses, it highlights some notable points:

- 99.6% of volunteers are members of their golf clubs.
- 95% of volunteers play golf at least once a week.
- 87% of volunteers were aged over 55 years, which compares to 63% of members (England Golf, 2018a).
- 68% of volunteers were retired.
- 31% of volunteers were female, which compares to 16% of members (England Golf, 2018a), although the requirement to fill various roles on a ladies section committee from a small ladies membership may account for comparatively high female volunteering rates.

Although the survey data has its limitations, it suggests that golf club volunteers are drawn from among members that play regular golf. The survey results also suggest that there may be a relationship between being older and retired and having more time to play golf and to volunteer. It is possible, of course, that retirees were more likely to complete the survey, thereby becoming over-represented in the sample. That said, the survey does tend to support anecdotal evidence that golf clubs rely on their older members to perform volunteer roles.

The survey of volunteers by England Golf (2017a) usefully identifies the various roles that volunteers play within golf clubs. Table 19 lists the most common volunteer roles identified by the survey, categorising them broadly by whether they are principally concerned with governance and management, organising and supporting play, or other helping out roles.

Table 19 - Typical volunteer roles in an associational golf club

Type	Roles
Governance and management	President Chairperson Board member / Trustee Club Captain Club Vice-Captain Chair of Finance / Treasurer Chair of Greens Chair of House / Hospitality Sub-committee member
Organising and supporting play	Men's Captain Men's Vice-Captain Ladies Captain Ladies Vice-Captain Seniors Captain Seniors Vice-Captain Junior Captain Junior Vice-Captain Handicap Secretary Competitions Secretary Junior Organiser Section committee member Volunteer helper for juniors Volunteer coach
Other helping out	Course maintenance Building / repair work Buddy for new members Social / entertainment secretary Events organiser / helper

4.5   English associational golf clubs included in this study

4.5.1   Club A

Club A is an associational golf club located in the south of England. The club has a long history dating back to the late nineteenth century. Its 18-hole golf course is challenging and considered one of the region's best. The clubhouse is modern and boasts excellent facilities, including plush changing rooms, an attractive lounge and a bar that serves drinks and food throughout the day. The club is located in an affluent area on the outskirts of a large urban area.

Club A has approximately 500 members. The club's full annual membership fee is around £1,600, although a variety of less expensive age-related and social memberships are available. Membership is restricted to players of a good standard, which partly reflects the challenging nature of the golf course. Although the club does have membership vacancies, it is not far off full capacity. Members are generally serious golfers who enjoy competing in club competitions. A fifth of members drive over 20 minutes to the golf club, which is an unusually high proportion. The club is typical of many golf clubs in having a majority of older male members, most of whom England Golf's Understand Your Market report classified as 'older traditionalists'. One in ten members is female and the juniors' section is small. The level of member churn, being the annual rate at which members leave, is comparatively low.

Several years ago, Club A moved away from a decentralised governance structure in which a large committee, supported by a professional club secretary, had managed the organisation. The members agreed to replace this structure with a small management committee of six volunteers who are now responsible for setting business plans and monitoring organisational performance. Members of the management committee are elected by the club's members for three-year terms. The management committee delegates day-to-day management to a professional general manager, who has extensive responsibilities. The general manager oversees a team of administrative, greenkeeping and in-house catering staff. There is also a club shop on site that is run by a Professional Golf Association (PGA) certified coach with a small team of assistant coaches and retail staff.

In addition to the six members on the main management committee, volunteers serve on a range of other committees. There are committees for the men's, ladies and seniors sections, which organise matches, competitions and social events. A volunteer runs the juniors with occasional assistance from other club members, parents and staff. There are various captains including a club, ladies, seniors and juniors captain. Members also help out informally through

occasional grounds maintenance working parties and volunteering to run open golf competitions.

The general manager described Club A as *'a market town golf club with the additional benefit of having an above-average golf course'*. The club had achieved Golf Mark status, an England Golf accreditation that indicates the club meets high standards in business planning, membership management, coaching, competitions and safeguarding. The club invests in its facilities and membership fees have risen to fund this. It places a strong emphasis on being friendly and welcoming. A fifth of the club's revenues come from green fees because the course's reputation attracts visitors. Overall, the club's strategy appears well aligned to the local market, which is characterised by wealthy households.

4.5.2 Club B

Club B is an associational golf club located in the north of England. As one of the oldest golf clubs in England, Club B has a long history. The 18-hole golf course overlooks the sea. On a sunny day, the views are glorious, although frequent poor weather can make play extremely challenging. One side of the golf course adjoins a housing estate with high levels of deprivation. The local town has suffered economically over recent decades and areas of high deprivation are now common.

Inside the clubhouse, the décor is a little dated, with anaglypta wallpaper and ceiling tiles. The main bar and lounge are functional and filled with traditional bar room furniture. Behind the main bar, there is a second bar room, which contains a full-sized snooker table and honours boards. This *'back bar'* used to be for men only. Although that rule was removed many years ago, the room retains a strong masculine presence and women rarely use it. There is an upstairs function room with a fantastic view, although it is not widely used. The bar opens in the afternoon. In the morning, refreshments are available to golfers from a hot-drinks machine. The club contracts out catering, but limited

trade meant this is barely sustainable and there had recently been a high turnover in caterers.

Historically, the club's membership had been as high as 600 but, at the time of the research, the club had 270 members. The full annual membership fee is around £600, with age-related and new member discounts available. The club's members are drawn from the local area, with few travelling long distances. Most members are serious golfers. The club has a small ladies' section with around 20 members, most of whom are retired. The club was trying to introduce a juniors' section after a period without one.

Club B is governed by a 'council' elected by the membership. Although the council had several vacancies, it still comprised 14 members. The club has both a men's and ladies captain, with the men's captain playing a leading role in governing the club during their year in office. There are also various management sub-committees, including a greens committee, a finance committee, and a social and marketing committee. The club struggles to recruit enough volunteers to fill council and committee roles. The club employs a part-time club secretary, a part-time administrative assistant, greenkeeping staff and bar staff. The club does not have a professional coach. The limited number of club staff means that volunteers are heavily involved in the day-to-day management of the club.

A declining membership has resulted in falling club income. The club recognises that it needs to expand its membership and generate more visitor income, but there isn't much consensus on how to do this. The club does not have a strategic business plan.

4.5.3   Club C

Club C is an associational golf club located in the west midlands. It has an 18-hole parkland golf course, which was established in the last decade of the twentieth century. The course is picturesque and moderately challenging. The

clubhouse is a modern construction and is functional, yet has a traditional feel with extensive wood panelling. The club is located in a rural setting on the edge of a market town. The drive from the town centre to the club takes around 15 minutes. The town is moderately affluent, with some areas of high wealth. The rural area surrounding the golf club is also reasonably affluent.

The club has just under 300 members. A variety of membership categories are offered including full, age-related and social memberships. The full membership fee was around £600. During 2018-19 the club experimented with a range of introductory offers to expand the membership. Although the club's membership includes many older traditionalists, the club also attracts older members looking for a more relaxed golfing experience and younger members looking to play competitive golf in a sociable setting. The club has a relaxed feel to it and so attracts golfers not wanting too much formality. The club doesn't place a strong emphasis on competitive golf, although that was available to those who wanted it. Females account for almost a fifth of members, which is comparatively high for a golf club. Most members live within a 20-minute drive of the golf club.

Like many golf clubs developed in the 1980s and 1990s, a local farmer built the golf course and operated it as a proprietary club for its first 25 years. During this period of proprietary ownership, the owner was responsible for the golf course and clubhouse. While the club had men's and ladies section committees to organise competitions and social activities, they held no responsibility for the management of facilities. Recently, however, the owner granted a 25-year lease to a private company limited by guarantee, which had been recently formed by the club's members. This new entity now operates all aspects of the club. It operates on a not-for-profit basis, with any financial surpluses reinvested in the club.

Since the switch to becoming a members' club, governance rests with a board of directors elected from among the membership. At the time of the research,

there were seven directors. The club does not employ a general manager, although it does have an administrator, golf club professional, grounds staff and catering staff. The club relies heavily on the efforts of two volunteer directors, who carry out a lot of day-to-day management tasks. The section committees have been retained and continue to organise competitions and social activities, as they did before. The club has both a men's and ladies captain, who play figurehead roles within the club. The club also has a junior organiser and a small team of other volunteers that help out with the juniors section. Since the change in ownership, club members have also volunteered for occasional grounds maintenance working parties.

Club C aims to be a friendly and welcoming local club. It adopts a mid-market position among local golf clubs, offering good progression for golfers formerly playing at a local municipal course but also offering something less expensive and less formal than other local associational clubs. Further to the change in ownership and the new board consulting extensively with members, the club has been invigorated. The club recently achieved Golf Mark accreditation from England Golf. The focus is now on growing membership and investing in the golf course.

4.5.4   Club D

Club D is an associational golf club located in the north of England. The club is over 100 years old and the 18-hole parkland course is well-regarded. The clubhouse is large. Over the years, it has received various extensions and upgrades. A recently refurbished main lounge provides a relaxed feel, although some of the smaller side rooms retain an old-fashioned feel. The club is located in an area with mixed demographics. While the rural area to the north and the immediate urban area to the south are moderately affluent, there are extensive areas of high deprivation in the local town.

Club D's full annual membership fee is around £700, with a variety of other membership categories including five-day, six-day, age-related and social

memberships. The club has just under 500 playing members. England Golf's Understand Your Market report indicates that, as with most golf clubs, Club D has a majority of 'older traditionalist' golfers. However, the club also has an unusually high proportion of 'late enthusiasts', who enjoy playing golf but are not too serious about the game. The local area is popular with retirees and some members have taken up the game in their retirement. The club also has over 250 non-playing social members and hires out the club's rooms to community groups early in the morning before golfers use them. As a result, the club is well-integrated with the local community. Most members live within a 10-minute drive of the golf club.

Club D is governed by a board of directors comprising 12 members. Several sub-committees support and feed into the board, including greens, finance and house sub-committees. The day-to-day management of the golf club is delegated to a general manager. The general manager oversees a team of staff including a greenkeeping team, a professional coach, administrative staff and hospitality staff. Section committees, including a men's, ladies, seniors and juniors sections, organise competition golf. The club also has a 'rabbits' section for players with a handicap of 18 or more. The club has a men's and ladies captain, as well as a president, who all play figurehead roles within the club.

Overall, Club D is traditional but gradually modernising. The club places a strong emphasis on being friendly and welcoming to the local community. The club has achieved Golf Mark accreditation from England Golf. The club is keen to attract and retain new members. It has an innovative new members scheme which provides discounted membership and a programme of support for new members.

5 Findings on the club socialisation of volunteers

5.1 Introduction

The findings from this PhD thesis are presented in chapters 5, 6 and 7. The three chapters follow the structure of the volunteer process model and are organised into three stages: antecedents, experiences and consequences. This chapter starts by presenting empirical findings on the club socialisation of volunteers. Chapter 6 covers volunteers' experiences of volunteer-member discussions. Chapter 7 then looks at the affective club commitment volunteers feel as a consequence of their experiences.

The findings presented in this chapter show how volunteers were socialised as golf club members and how this influenced them becoming volunteers. The findings are arranged into five categories. Each category was formed through the grouping of initial codes into focussed codes. Table 20 below summarises the focussed and initial codes. The focussed codes comprise new member uncertainty, assimilation into the golf club, feeling comfortable as an established member, activation of volunteering and being a volunteer. These codes, which form the basis of this study's club socialisation theory, are illustrated over the coming pages with examples of qualitative data. Theoretical coding was used to arrange the focussed codes in sequence to form a social process. A conceptual diagram, which visualises the golf club socialisation process and lists the key properties of each stage and transition, is presented in Figure 9 at the end of this chapter on page 156.

Table 20 – Evidence base for codes on the socialisation of volunteers

Focussed code	Initial codes	Interviewees	Observation and documents
New member – feeling uncertain	Unfamiliar with behavioural norms	A2, A4, B2, B4, C1, C3, C4, C5, C7, D1, D3, E4, E6	Normative behaviours observed in all golf clubs – e.g. dress codes and other documented rules.
	Relational uncertainty	A1, A3, A4, A6, B3, B4, C2, C3, C4, C5, C6, D1, D2, D3, D4, E1, E3, E6	Observed new or solo golfers in and around the clubhouse.
	Playing uncertainty	A2, A4, B2, C1, C2, C3, C5, C7, D1, D2, D3, E2	Documents that note and describe the challenges of playing golf, including references to new golfers.
Assimilation into the club	Spending time at the club	A1, A2, A6, B2, B3, B4, C4, C5, C7, D1, D2, D3, E1, E3	-
	Social interaction	A2, A3, A4, B1, B2, B4, C1, C2, C4, C5, C6, C7, D1, D2, D3, D4, E1, E3, E4, E5, E6	Researcher observation of social interactions between members in and around the clubhouse.
	Confidence playing the sport	A1, A4, A5, B1, B4, C5, C6, D1, E1, E4, E5, E6	-
Established member – feeling comfortable	Routine	A1, A5, A6, B1, B2, C4, C6, C7, D2, D3, D4, E1, E3, E4, E5	Routines observed in all clubs. Also gathered documents that recorded evidence of routines (e.g. competition schedules).
	Group participation	A1, A2, A3, B1, B2, B3, C1, C2, C3, C4, C5, C6, C7, D1, D2, D3, D4, E1, E2, E3, E4, E5, E6, E7	Group dynamics observed extensively in all clubs.
Activation of volunteering	Socially rooted	A2, A3, A4, B1, B2, B4, C1, C2, C4, C6, C7, D2, D3, D4, E1, E2, E4, E5, E6, E7	-
	Informed decision	A1, A2, A3, A4, A5, A6, B1, B2, B3, C1, C2, C3, C4, C5, C6, C7, D2, D4, E1, E2, E3, E4, E5, E6, E7	-
Volunteer	Meaningful contribution	A1, A2, A3, A4, A5, A6, B1, B2, B3, B4, C1, C2, C3, C4, C5, C6, C7, D1, D2, D3, D4, E1, E2, E3, E4, E5, E6, E7	-
	Change goals	A1, A4, A5, B3, B4 ,C1, C2, C5, C7, D1, D2, E3, E4, E5, E6, E7	-

Table 20 also highlights the data sources that the codes were derived from. All interviewees were current volunteers, which means that the interview data is derived from volunteers reflecting on their past experiences. For eight interviewees, who were long-standing golf club members, their new member experiences were many decades ago. Interviews with these volunteers, therefore, tended to reveal less data around new member uncertainty and assimilation into the club. For the early stages of club socialisation more reliance was placed on the accounts of the eleven interviewees that had taken up golf as adults and the nine interviewees that had returned to golf as adults. Observation data was also important in understanding new member uncertainty. For the later stages of the club socialisation process, all interviewees provided rich qualitative data.

5.2 The stages and transitions of club socialisation

5.2.1 Feeling uncertain as a new member

On joining a golf club, new members are faced with a range of uncertainties. They have paid their membership fee and assumed official member status, but they may not feel like a bona fide member. Golf clubs have distinctive behavioural norms, complex social networks and expectations of how people should play golf. New members may be unsure about some or all of these. As such, interviewees described the hesitations and trepidations they felt as new members. The behavioural, relational and playing uncertainties are explored below.

Unfamiliar with behavioural norms

From observing golf clubs during the study, it is apparent that social order is maintained through behavioural norms. Within golf clubs, there are shared expectations of how members should behave, both on and off the course. These expectations are formed by the members as they interact with one another and through the establishment of club rules. Although golf clubs share much, behavioural norms vary from club to club, so no two clubs are the same.

On the course, members can typically be expected to follow course etiquettes such as wearing appropriate clothing, keeping their temper, turning off mobile phones, maintaining a good pace of play, letting faster groups play through, following the rules of golf, replacing divots, repairing pitch marks and raking bunkers after use. For example, in Club B a group of golfers were observed openly discussing their irritation at unrepaired pitch marks on the greens:

> *A group of golfers entered the bar having completed their round of golf. On greeting other golfers in the bar, they expressed their irritation at how many unrepaired pitch marks they had seen on the greens. Several of the group said that some golfers were too lazy to repair their own pitch marks and that they should be identified and reprimanded. Another felt that it was a matter of education: "We need to do more to make sure everyone understands that it's their responsibility to repair pitch marks". [Participant observation notes at club B].*

In the clubhouse, members can typically be expected to act with decorum and observe the dress code. On several occasions, golfers were observed to comment on *'maintaining standards'* and '*not letting standards slip*' within the clubhouse. Such overt comments were, however, relatively rare. Instead, it was apparent that members acted and dressed conservatively. This was especially the case in clubs A and D, where there was a greater sense of formality. One interviewee, who had mixed feelings over the need to maintain traditional standards, explained:

> *The club tries to maintain standards. It is like the very traditional aspects of the game. It's not so much to do with the actual standard of the players, more to do with standards of behaviour, dress codes and things like that. [A4]*

Some behavioural norms are codified through rules and regulations. These typically include local playing rules and dress codes. Although codification has the potential to help new members understand what is expected of them, the

codes themselves sometimes contain ambiguities. An example of a club dress code, which offers guidance but not without ambiguity, is provided below:

> *[The club] promotes a high standard of etiquette, and respect for others, throughout all aspects of the game of golf and membership of our Club. These rules are to make members, guests and visitors feel welcome and comfortable within our Club.*
>
> *On the Golf Course - Recognised golf attire and footwear only must be worn.*
>
> *In the Clubhouse - Please ensure all footwear and clothing, including jeans, are smart, and not torn or soiled. Clean golfing footwear with the exception of soft or metal spikes, are acceptable in the clubhouse. Sandals without socks may be worn in the Clubhouse but no flip flops (beachwear). Golf shirts may be worn on the outside if they do NOT have shirttails.*
>
> *Mobile Phones - It is requested that mobile phones are kept on silent and calls made, or received inside the main clubhouse, are to be in the foyer area only.*

The formality created by rules is often amplified by the traditions of golf clubs. From spending time in golf clubs and observing the club environment, one is left with a deep sense of history. Old trophies and memorabilia are exhibited on the walls and in glass-fronted cabinets. Historic photographs are on display. Honours boards list club officers and competition winners over the years. In some clubs, pictures of past presidents and captains are also hung on the walls. Even Club C, with a comparatively short history spanning less than 25 years, imitates these traditions to create a clubhouse with a historic feel. The history and traditions of golf clubs are, therefore, visible to all who enter them, although their meaning may not be immediately apparent to newcomers.

Club history and tradition, when combined with the club rules noted above, imbue a sense of formality. It is a sense of formality that is less common within modern leisure environments. As such, golf clubs can be foreboding institutions

to those unfamiliar with them – something attested to by this study's researcher who was new to golf:

> *I arrived for my first meeting at Club A. The entrance hall was clad in dark wood. I took a moment to look at various trophies and club memorabilia on display in the glass-fronted cabinet. I then went upstairs to enter the club lounge. As I opened the door, I felt a deep sense of uncertainty – what would I find on the other side? There were three groups of senior male golfers sat at tables, chatting away. They noticed me come in but didn't say anything. I didn't venture far inside and immediately sat at a table by the door. To my right, there were pictures of the club captains. I felt uncomfortable. [Researcher observation notes].*

For some golfers, their choice of golf club may have been made with a view to avoiding excessive uncertainties around behavioural norms. For example, one interviewee described his choice of golf club to support relaxation and avoid having to cope with excessive behavioural expectations:

> *I joined this club because I didn't fancy anything too formal. I wanted something more reasonably relaxed. I didn't really want the sneering noses and the blazers for a Sunday sort of thing. [C3]*

New members may only become aware of the behavioural norms when they break them. For example, even at a comparatively informal golf club, one female told of how she attracted comment from another female member for wearing inappropriate footwear:

> *When I first joined somebody said to me, "Oh god, you're going to be a pain. Look at those trainers." I had these flowery trainers on that I thought were quite cool. [C5]*

Through observing golf club life and reviewing club documents, it is apparent that routines are another important facet of normative behaviour. Patterned actions are repeated daily, weekly, monthly and annually. For example, each

golf club has a regular weekly playing schedule with regular tee-time slots allotted to the various sections. There may also be weekly tee-times set aside for regular roll-up groups, whereby members can simply turn up to play with others without pre-registering. Each year there will be a regular programme of internal competitions. There will also be a regular schedule of matches against other golf clubs and open competitions. The club and each section will have an annual general meeting. With the election each year of new club captains there will be an annual 'drive-in' event to symbolise their accession. The repetition of such practices by the members and staff creates order within the golf club.

Again, it is by flouting an established routine that uninitiated newcomers may become aware of behavioural expectations. For example, an interviewee described how her failure to join the ladies in their regular playing slot was met with disdain:

> *I was asked, "would I be playing on a Tuesday when the ladies play?" I was like, "I can't do that, I work, I work full time." "What? You're one of those that work?" "Yes, because I'm 30 something and I have to work." "Can you not change your hours so that you can play on a Tuesday with the women?" "No, doesn't work like that." "Well, you're going to have to play on Saturday then, aren't you?" "Yes, I am, but I actually wanted to play with my husband." "Well, that's not how it works, you have to play with the ladies." I was like, "Okay, but I don't want to play with the ladies," because I didn't know what I was doing. I battled through it all. The first two or three years were quite difficult. [C5]*

Overall, lack of familiarity, and the uncertainty this induced, was greatest among those interviewees that had taken up golf in their adult life and had limited prior knowledge of golf before joining their clubs. As they joined the golf club, they experienced behaviours that were different from their other leisure-time experiences. Practices that were familiar to established members were an unknown quantity for newcomers. One female, who had not been playing golf long when joining her club, explained:

There is a supposition that you know what you're signing up for. If you've never actually been in the club and been involved with it, well, how does it work? [C7]

Prior experience as a member at other golf clubs tended to reduce anxieties. Whilst all golf clubs differ from one to another, they share much. A general understanding of golf clubs therefore reduced uncertainty. One long-standing golfer with a low handicap, over 30 years membership and extensive volunteering experience at another golf club, who had recently joined a golf club following a house move, commented:

Golf clubs are golf clubs, aren't they? They all follow the same structure. [E1]

Experienced golfers were already familiar with the broad range of practices commonly found within golf clubs. This included those golfers that had returned to golf in their adult life, having learnt the game as a junior. Their experiences of golf club life as a junior had not left them, and they could draw upon this knowledge when joining a golf club later in their adult life. They only needed to develop an understanding of the particularities of their new golf club. If the behaviours learnt at previous golf club aligned with the expectations of their new golf club, then uncertainty could be minimal.

Relational uncertainties

As new members, interviewees had to deal with relational uncertainties. Golf clubs are characterised by a network of social relationships. With large memberships, various formal playing sections and lots of smaller informal playing groups, new members can feel as if they are on the periphery of a complex social system. The complexity of the system was described by one club chairman:

There's lots of little groups, and in some places they could be cliques, but the groups are like little Venn diagrams basically. That group could still be a part of that group, slightly. [A1]

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New members face uncertainties around who they should develop relations with inside the golf club. They also face uncertainties over how to develop relationships. These feelings of uncertainty are amplified by observing the sociability of other members. For example, one interviewee described how the inability to form social relations had left him feeling uncomfortable at a previous golf club:

> I was there for just over two years and I only ever played in the same four-ball. I never ever got invited to play in another group. Never got approached about….. I was low enough to play in their first team. Yeah, I wasn't overly comfortable there. [E3]

Relational uncertainties applied regardless of whether new members were an experienced golfer. For example, an experienced golfer, while familiar with the general golf club environment, still noted that he was experiencing some uncertainty at his new club:

> I'm still finding my feet a little bit. I've played in a couple of competitions and met the pro and stuff like that, but it will probably be the springtime before I really get to know people and joining in with teams and stuff like that. [E1]

Playing uncertainties

New members face similar uncertainties around playing golf. This is especially so if they are new to the game and are not proficient golfers. As newcomers, some interviewees had been fearful of getting in the way on the golf course and holding up play. They worried about breaking the rules of golf. They felt anxious about playing badly, getting things wrong and being shown up. One female described how she had joined the golf club with two other friends, having previously played at a local municipal course. She described how a lack of confidence in their golfing abilities led them to avoid contact with other golfers:

The three of us would come down late in the evenings. Out of sight! We were frightened of getting involved in the golf club. We used to park up at the far end of the car park and zip on to the course to play nine holes and back in the car and out. We never ever came in the clubhouse. We got people coming up to say, "When are you going to get your handicaps?" Very scary. We just thought it was very scary. [D1]

It was only after her two playing partners moved on that she was forced to join the ladies section on the golf club. It was an experience that filled her with trepidation:

In the end, I had to join in with the other ladies and it was winter by now. In winter, they have a roll-up on a Thursday morning where you just turn up and you get drawn to play with other people. It was the scariest thing I have ever done in my life, was to turn up there. [Laughs]. I hadn't slept all night. Honestly, it was very traumatic. [D1]

These fears were not entirely without foundation. Several interviewees told of how they had been admonished on the golf course. As a new golfer it was not uncommon to be told to *'hurry up'* by better golfers or let better golfers play through. Some interviewees were also aware of other new members being told off. Furthermore, during observational work, the researcher heard various stories about golfers being reprimanded. For example:

I was chatting to a golfer in the bar, explaining what my research was about and discussing the challenges of being new to golf. He described how, as a novice golfer, he had been reprimanded at another golf club. After hitting an errant tee-shot, slicing it badly right on to another fairway, he hadn't shouted fore to warn others. He said that the shot was so bad, he didn't want to draw attention to it. The ball flew past a golfer on the other hole who then subjected him to a torrent of verbal abuse. He was accused of being a danger and lacking basic courtesy. He felt hugely embarrassed. The incident affected his confidence and he didn't play for several weeks, until he had practised a lot more on the driving range and got his confidence back. [Researcher observations from Club C]

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Not all admonishments are delivered as insensitively as described above. Nevertheless, for new members to live in fear of admonishment was to inwardly recognise that they had much to learn about playing golf and the ways that you are expected to behave out on the golf course.

Overall, females interviewed in this study tended to talk about higher levels of anxiety about playing golf when joining their club. In part, this was because many of them had taken up the game later in life and they were therefore less confident about their golfing abilities. Some female interviewees also spoke about how, despite significant efforts by the golf industry and golf clubs to be more welcoming to women, they only felt comfortable when playing with supportive groups.

5.2.2 'Settling in' as a member

After talking about the uncertainties of joining their golf club, interviewees were asked to reflect on how they had adapted to their new golf club environment. Several interviewees referred to this process as '*settling in'* and how this led them to feel more comfortable. Analysis of interview data highlighted several factors that made this transition possible. As shall be shown below, interviewees' transitions towards feeling comfortable within their golf club was hastened by spending time at the golf club, social interaction and developing confidence in playing golf.

Before illustrating the key transition factors, it worth noting that not all new members successfully make the transition. Since the focus of this research is on golf club volunteers, interviewees had successfully transitioned towards feeling comfortable in their golf clubs. However, interviewees also told stories of how they had failed to integrate at previous golf clubs. They were also aware that other new members had failed to integrate. Furthermore, from the stories told by interviewees it was apparent that progression towards feeling comfortable

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wasn't necessarily seamless. Bad experiences were occasionally interwoven with positive learning experiences. When negative experiences occurred, they pushed new members backwards towards uncertainty. Making the transition towards feeling comfortable could be messy and require perseverance.

Spending time at the golf club

Spending time at the golf club helps to socialise new members. Interviewees talked about how time spent on the course and in the clubhouse was time spent learning about the golf club. It allowed interviewees to observe the rhythms and routines of each day and exposed them to more social interactions. The more often they had visited the golf club, the sooner they began to feel comfortable.

Golf is a time-intensive pastime with 18 holes usually taking around four hours to play. Changes in family or work circumstances often created space for more leisure time. Some interviewees talked about children growing up and how this left them with time to play golf. Retirement from work was another common catalyst, as demonstrated by this interviewee:

> *When I retired, I just wanted to freewheel and enjoy myself. It*
> *was nice coming up here three or four times a week and*
> *enjoying my golf. [A1]*

Interviewees were aware that some golf club members lacked the time to get more involved. Work and family commitments were often cited as significant constraints. Where time spent at the club was limited, members could remain anonymous to those more closely involved with the club. They were often referred to as '*car park golfers'*, as this interviewee describes:

> *There are some people, and probably people that are working,*
> *who just come up and play golf, who might not even come into*
> *the bar for a drink. They come up, play the golf and get back in*
> *the car and go home, because they have been away for 4*
> *hours and that's as long as their family will allow. [A2]*

It is not possible to put a specific timeframe on how long it took for interviewees to settle into their club because there was much variability across the interviewees. Interviewees had different backgrounds and different early experiences within the golf club, and so the amount of time taken to transition varied considerably. In some cases, individuals began to feel comfortable within a matter of months. At the other end of the spectrum, it took several years.

Social interaction

The transition towards feeling comfortable was made possible by social interaction. It is through interactions with others that interviewees learnt how the golf club worked and what meanings were attached to the club's cultural practices. The actions of others were observed and copied. Experiences were shared and knowledge passed on. It was by developing an understanding of cultural practices and performing the taken-for-granted actions that interviewees began to feel comfortable. In essence, it was about learning to '*fit in*'.

Finding a group of golfers to play and socialise with was a central feature of golf club socialisation. From observing golf club life, it was evident that members formed themselves into a variety of different groups. Groups could be informal groups of friends or family. They could be semi-formal such as regular weekly roll-ups organised by a group of like-minded members. Groups could also be formal such as the competitors in the regular weekly competitions organised by the golf club's section committees. Since these groups are made up of established members, they tended to enact the normative practices of the golf club. That said, each group has its own distinct characteristics – a '*tribe within a tribe*' as one golf club member was overheard saying. Some groups were loud and brash, while others were more genteel. Some groups placed an emphasis on competitive golf, while others valued sociability more.

Finding a suitable group can be difficult, especially if a new member does not know anyone in the club. Opportunities to integrate may be limited. When a group is found, however, the process of socialisation can build quickly. For example, one interviewee described how initial uncertainties about a new golf club receded once he found an agreeable group of members to play and socialise with:

> *[The club is] quite famous in the local area. It always had a reputation for being quite stiff and quite cliquey, and you couldn't get in. That melted away. Once I joined that melted away very, very quickly, and I soon realized actually it's just a normal working men's golf club, and everyone likes a beer and a laugh, and I got on with the right crowd fairly quickly. That helped to be honest, meeting the right people straight away.*
> *[E6]*

In a similar way, another interviewee described how their integration into the golf club took off once he found a playing group:

> *When I joined the first couple of years I didn't know many people. I mean, it sounds a long time but I was busy as well so it didn't really matter. Then, it was one January, there was a Burns Night supper here. I came with my wife. We sat on a table with a guy called Ed and had a great night and Ed said, "You want to join the club?" He said, "You'd really enjoy it." I said, "Ed, I have joined the club. It's costing me 500 quid a round at the moment." Right, he says, "Get your ass down here tomorrow morning, 9:30 you've got a game." There was a group called The Slugs and they meet every Wednesday morning and Saturday morning and I've never looked back.*
> *[D3]*

For some interviewees, their choice of golf club was made because they already knew people at the golf club. They knew family, friends or work colleagues that were existing members. This provided immediate access to playing partners. It also lubricated the formation of social connections within the new club as their family, friends and work colleagues introduced them to other members within

the club. It greatly accelerated the transition from the periphery of the club's social network towards the inside.

One interviewee described how knowing existing members at the golf club greatly accelerated his integration into the club and allowed him to settle in quickly:

> *I was lucky enough to have two of my best mates here. Well,*
> *three of them because one joined with me as well. I also knew*
> *a few of the lads anyway because my brother had been a*
> *member here about six years ago. [E4]*

Another interviewee talked about her golf education, describing how playing with her family helped her to acquire knowledge and understanding:

> *My cousin and I decided that we would play golf one summer,*
> *for something to do, a bit of exercise. My mum and my aunt*
> *were very good golfers, they played in the ladies team here.*
> *They took us out all the time, practising and learning the rules,*
> *what we should do and what we shouldn't do. [B2]*

Some golf clubs have recognised how settling in can be difficult for new members that didn't know people in the club. These clubs have introduced new member and buddying schemes which pair up new members with existing members. This was in evidence at Club D, where new golfers were taken out on to the course together with an experienced member who could pass on knowledge. New members were also able to form supportive peer groups. The scheme was only two years old but was already succeeding in improving member retention.

Confidence in playing golf

New members' transition towards feeling comfortable was greatly improved when they had confidence in their golfing ability. Confident golfers were more willing to play with people they did not know. Confident golfers were also more willing to play competitive golf. The sections within golf clubs organise weekly competitions. Playing in these provides a regular opportunity to meet a range of people and extend social networks.

One interviewee who had played a lot of junior golf and had a low handicap described how he was happy to turn up and play, which rapidly extended his social relations when joining a club:

> *Our club has a lot of roll-ups where everyone just turns up and you all get drawn against each other and you go and play. They're great because you can just turn up and you play different people each week, and very quickly you meet a lot of people. The two ways I got involved in the club very quickly was that, and by playing in knock-outs, so you meet new people every time you played in a match. That was the two ways I settled into it very quickly. [E6]*

When golfing ability was mixed with a gregarious nature, the process of socialisation was often rapid. Another interviewee with experience of playing golf when living overseas described how competitive golf accelerated his socialisation:

> *You stick your name down on the start sheet for a competition wherever there happens to be a gap. I wasn't particularly interested in necessarily playing golf with a particular person. I just stuck my name down with whoever, wherever the gaps happened to be. That way, I got to meet various members of the club. I'm a reasonably gregarious individual, quite happy to talk to people. [C6]*

5.2.3 Feeling comfortable as an established member

In the interviews with golf club volunteers, after talking about their early experiences of playing golf and joining a golf club, volunteers usually moved on discuss how they settled into their golf club. From analysing this interview data and observing members in golf clubs, it is apparent that members reach a point at which they feel comfortable within their golf club. Whereas the golf club's cultural practices may have been a source of uncertainty as a newcomer, as an established member these same practices provide an agreeable framework in which to pursue their golfing hobby. The main features of being an established member are routine and group participation. These features are described below.

Routine

Members feel comfortable when they establish a routine. Through repeated enactment, activities become meaningful. Most interviewees had settled on playing golf at a certain time of the week. They followed a set routine, including pre-golf, during golf and post-golf. They felt comfortable with the routine and its associated rituals. A selection of the many playing routines described by interviewees is provided below:

> *Well I play golf 2 or 3 times a week. I'm always up here on Mondays and Wednesdays. [A1]*

> *I play Tuesdays and Thursdays. I've still managed to play with my lot on Tuesdays. And I just mix and play with others. I never used to be a Saturday golfer but I tend to play some Saturdays now as well. [A5]*

> *I do a junior coaching session every Tuesday evening. We call it an assisted practice session. We do two hours every Tuesday afternoon/evening throughout the summer. [A6]*

> *We have our own tee reservation on a Wednesday for the ladies competitions…… Wednesday, it's our golf day. [B1]*

In the summer, I'll play on a Tuesday and I might go up and do a bit of practice but as a concept I'm a traditional, I play once at the weekend and I'll play once in the week. [E5]

Group participation

Routines were particularly powerful when they were performed together with a group of other members. Indeed, group participation and routine were so often intertwined. The group routines not only comprised regular playing times but also eating and drinking practices. They provided reliable and enjoyable social interactions. Thus, participation in a group of members becomes an essential feature of feeling comfortable within a golf club.

The following researcher observation is an example of a scene commonly seen within golf clubs:

At lunchtime, a group of 10 members, mostly aged in their 60s, came in from their morning rounds and sat together as one group around two tables. They sat down around one large table and had a meal together. They were relaxed in each other's company. They discussed their respective successes and failures from the morning's golf. They then discussed a series of issues in the news and exchanged views on them. The topics of conversation were potentially controversial, spanning Brexit and climate change, but they were able to disagree in a good-natured way using humour to lighten the atmosphere when required. The group chatted together for well over an hour before they started to drift off home. As each person left, they invariably parted with a jovial 'see you next week'. [Researcher observation notes at Club C]

Another typical account of group participation was provided by one interviewee:

I got into a regular group, probably about ten of us that went out fairly regularly. That became routine. We'd play at the weekend and we'd play Wednesday. In the winter, we'd come and have a bacon sandwich and then go out in the afternoon. In the summer, we arrived at teatime so that people who are

> *still working could come out and we played during the*
> *evening. [D2]*

The act of routinely playing with a group formed close social bonds. Relations sometimes became so close that social interactions were extended beyond golf club life:

> *I like playing Saturday mornings. We've got a great group that play Saturdays morning. We're not worried about handicap, age, race. We've got two women that play with us. Two young girls. One's 20 or 21, the other is 24. Again, both playing off 21 to 26. We really are now a group that's pretty all-encompassing. There are a couple of people who don't necessarily like the way we play. We're a bit boisterous and a bit loud and so on and so forth.*

> *We've built a group now of say 35 to 40 like-minded guys. We're all there to have a good time. We've got our WhatsApp chat where some piss gets taken in. We've got a great group of guys now that's growing. We're all like-minded and we're all pushing on. We're mates outside of golf as well. We can go there Saturdays and know you're going to get a game. [E3]*

The importance of regular participation and the formation of social bonds was emphasised by a volunteer who was no longer able to play golf. In his late 70s, he had recently had to stop playing. Although continuing to help out on the seniors committee, he was concerned that his inability to routinely participate and socialise would gradually erode his enthusiasm. His reflections emphasise the importance of routine play and socialisation in creating a bond with the golf club:

> *It's the camaraderie, because they're a great group of guys. With not being on the course and meeting the guys as often, it could dilute the activity and enthusiasm I have for the club. I don't know how that's going to affect my enthusiasm going forward. As you distance yourself from the playing members, it becomes less important I suppose. [D4]*

Virtually every volunteer interviewed as part of the research described their golf club as '*welcoming and friendly*'. Their integration was such that they now understood golf club life, knew lots of members and felt '*at home*'. That said, some interviewees recognised that the '*welcoming and friendly*' perspective was that of an established member. Interviewees that had taken up golf relatively recently, and had felt a high degree of uncertainty on joining their club, were more likely to recognise that the friendliness of the golf club was a matter of perspective:

> *I know I can come down here anytime and there will be*
> *somebody to talk to. There'll be somebody I know or a person*
> *behind the bar even, you know everybody. It's just such a great*
> *friendly place but it doesn't have that aspect from looking into*
> *it from outside, you've got to get in. [D1]*

Similarly, another interviewee, who had taken up golf as an adult and had been a member for less than ten years, was able to reflect on her time as a new member and contrast it with how she now felt comfortable at her golf club:

> *I do try and remember [when I first joined] because when I*
> *was playing and other people were on the course and saying*
> *"you should come and join us on a Tuesday, it'd be great." But*
> *there is a supposition that you know what you're signing up*
> *for there. If you've never actually been in the club and been*
> *involved with it, well, how does it work? I think that's quite an*
> *important thing to remember sometimes that if you've not*
> *actually been in the club and been in the section and been*
> *active, then you don't know what you don't know at that*
> *point. [C7]*

Reflective interviewees such as these were able to contrast how they first perceived the golf club when joining and recognised that their perspective had changed. A period of '*settling in*' had helped them to feel comfortable among other members and with the club's way of doing things. They recognised that the golf club may not feel friendly to today's newcomers. As established

members and now volunteers, they worried that they were no longer able to view the golf club objectively having succumbed to an insider's view of the club:

> *I just wonder whether or not, having said how welcoming it is and how friendly is, I just wonder whether I'm surreptitiously being drawn into the culture of the club and thinking, "Well actually this is fine." And maybe an outsider, might have a different perspective on it. I would like to think not. I would like to think there is some realism about the way I view the club. [D2]*

5.2.4   Activating volunteering

Rooted in social relationships

Although settling into the golf club and becoming an established member created a pathway towards volunteering, the transition into volunteering still needed activating. Analysis of the interview data highlighted how activation was invariably rooted in social relationships. Individuals were either asked to perform a role or put themselves forward for a role in the knowledge that they would be supported by other members.

For the majority of interviewees, the decision to volunteer was activated when they were asked to volunteer for a specific role. Within golf clubs, it is uncommon for formal recruitment and selection processes to be used. Recruitment tends to be via word of mouth. Invitations to volunteer were usually made by an existing volunteer on behalf of a club committee. It was made possible because the individual was known to current volunteers. An invitation to volunteer was, therefore, contingent on the invitee having formed sufficient social networks within the golf club to make this possible. This was summed up nicely by one interviewee:

> *I think because I integrated so well, I came to the attention if you like, of the men's committee. They're always looking for individuals willing to help out. [C4]*

Interviewees often perceived that the invitation to volunteer was made because they possessed the necessary skills and experience to fill the volunteer role. Again, this was possible because the individual, including their skills, experience and behaviour, were known to existing volunteers. For example, one interviewee regularly played in a group of members that included several board and committee members. It was through social interaction and by divulging information about his work career that led to a request to volunteer when an appropriate vacancy arose:

> *The sections run separately each with a committee and someone has to take the minutes. So, because I have a local government background people assume you can take notes, which is true to some degree. So, I thought, yes, I'm happy to be accepted on to the men's committee. [C4]*

Similarly, one female interviewee described how her skills and experience became known to others:

> *Once I had started to play a bit more and got involved in little things like baking cakes [laughter] and that type of thing, people realised that I had worked in accounts for, well I wouldn't call it a career, but for a living [laughter], and they needed a treasurer for the ladies section. So, I was asked to join the committee as the treasurer for the ladies section. [A4]*

Another volunteer explained how he got involved with the seniors committee:

> *At the time, all of the senior competitions were not board competitions, so they were off the main computer, as it was then. Because one of my sad passions is spreadsheets, and I had been involved with scoring systems at previous clubs, when the guys found out about that, I was asked to get involved. [D4]*

Interviewees were generally flattered by an invitation to volunteer. The invitation was tacit recognition that they were now an established member of

the club. Those asking had, in effect, determined that the member was '*one of us*'.

For a minority of interviewees, the route into volunteering was activated when they put themselves forward for a role. This was possible because interviewees had felt comfortable within the golf club and knew with whom to speak. Thus, for example, one interviewee described how, since he was on good social terms with the club's Junior Organiser, he was able to put himself forward:

> *I just said to him one day, "If ever you need a hand, I'd be happy to help". I'm not a coach or anything like that, but because I'm an army officer, I'm used to working with young people. It's a fairly natural thing for me. [C6]*

Similarly, one interviewee described how his progress on to the club's board of directors was grounded in established membership and advanced by the support of a fellow member:

> *After a couple of years, two or three years, seeing what was going on, I thought well, I've never been one to just come along and freeload. I thought, "Well, I wonder what I can give back." I volunteered to go on the board. I knew somebody who had been a member a long time, who had been vice-captain. She was almost a sponsor for me.........I think if you have a sponsor or somebody that can show you the way in or get you in, that helps. [D2]*

For many golf club roles, especially board and committee roles, volunteers are elected from among the membership. This happens at the club Annual General Meeting each year or at each section committee's annual meeting. The process usually involves discussions between existing volunteers and the prospective volunteer in advance of the meeting. Elections are not often contested, with preferred candidates having been primed by existing board and committee members. For example, a section captain describes how he was elected to the role:

> *In October one of the members of the committee said 'actually how do you fancy taking over as captain?'*
>
> *[In December], we had the AGM and I was the only person who was nominated. Erm, basically there was about 40 people in this room and it came to the election of the Captain and the Secretary said '[A3] here has volunteered', and before anybody could ask who was in favour, they all went 'yeah yeah yeah yeah', and that was it'. [A3]*

Where elections were contested, having strong social networks within the club was important. One interview talked about an upcoming election to the golf club's governing body. As a long-standing member of the club with extensive relationships, she was well-placed to get elected:

> *There's going to be 18 of us up there. God, I don't know what it's going to be like. Will I get elected? A lot of people said, "You've got my vote," but you never know do you. [B1]*

Whether the individual was asked or whether they put themselves forward, the establishment of good social relations in the golf club was a common factor in becoming a volunteer. There was a shared understanding between prospective volunteers and existing volunteers that they were reliable club members and had something useful to contribute. Thus, the activation process was built on the bedrock of an individual being an established member.

Informed decision

By the activation transition phase, interviewees were established members and familiar with their golf club. They were familiar with their golf club's structure, activities and accepted behaviours. They were also embedded among group relationships. As established members, interviewees had been well-placed to understand the roles and responsibilities of volunteers within their golf club. They were also well-placed to understand the significance of volunteer roles. The decision to volunteer was, therefore, informed.

A club captain, with many years' experience as a club member, spoke about how he had been able to assess the requirements of being a club captain. He recognised that it was a symbolically important role that shouldn't be undertaken lightly:

> *I did think seriously about it because obviously if I was going to do the job, I wanted to make sure I was doing it properly, and that I've got the ability to spend as much time as it takes up here for the year that I'm captain. There is a sacrifice to it on the captain's side of things because of the amount of time you spend. [A5]*

Similarly, another volunteer described how he understood the significance of becoming a board member at his club:

> *If you want to be on the management committee, you know, you've got to understand that you are on the committee for three years. Yes you can come off inside that time, but there is a commitment that you are giving…….. I understood the commitment. [A1]*

Another volunteer explained how her knowledge of what was involved in being section treasurer meant she was willing to volunteer:

> *I was happy to be the treasurer because I knew what that was. I knew what I was letting myself in for, more or less. [C7]*

For established golf club members, the decision to volunteer could be very purposeful. Being well-informed allowed some members to identify some of the changes they would like to make as a volunteer. For example, one interviewee explained how his experience of junior golf, observing the junior section at his club and discussing the role with the club professional provided a basis to take on the junior organiser role:

> *The junior section was run down at the club. There were only seven members when I took it over. My boy had got to the age where he was at five and six and he was showing an interest. I*

wanted him to experience what I did with a great junior section. So I just thought I could take over and the club pro, who was running it at the time, he wasn't paying it the properly attention it probably deserved. Obviously, he's got a lot on his plate as club pro anyway. I just thought I'd take it over. I had a word with the pro and he said, "Yes, fine, you crack on running it." That's really how it came about. [E7]

Without a prior period of organisational socialisation, it seems that the decision to volunteer would lack the same meaning. Being an established member meant that interviewees appreciated the golf club's ways of doing things and were inclined to uphold its traditions and cultural practices. In describing the honour he felt at being asked to be club captain, one interviewee highlights how taking on the volunteer role was full of meaning:

It's such an honour to be asked to do it. It's the fact that the course has been here since the late 1800s. And you think of the number of members that have been through this place over all those years. And that's the board of club captains there. You look at the number of club captains there have been over the years compared to the number of members that there are. And to be singled out to be asked to do….to be singled out to do it is a massive honour. [A5]

The decision to decline a volunteer role could be just as meaningful as the decision to take on a role. Respect for the club, including its members and its traditions, meant that some volunteers had turned down more high-profile roles. These decisions were meaningful because the importance of the role was understood. For example:

I was once asked if I would stand as vice-captain. At the time, I was doing a lot of consulting for companies in the US and in Europe, so I was very busy on that front. I didn't feel as though I could put enough effort in because it's a high commitment when you're at that level. The following year you're captain. So I backed off that. I didn't want to be highly visible. [D4]

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For some established members, knowing what is involved put them off certain volunteer roles. One interviewee described how the ladies section was struggling to recruit a future captain because members had witnessed the current captain struggle with the volunteer role:

> The lady vice at the moment -- who's coming in in mid-January-ish -- the lady vice cannot find a vice of her own because they've gone "no, I've seen what [the current ladies captain] has been through, I'm not doing that". [E3]

Similarly, when one young female volunteer in her 20s was asked if she would like to become a board member, her response was very clear:

> No, I would hate to. I've got to be honest. It's all well and good being a volunteer on a committee or helping-out in competitions and stuff like that, but at [my golf club] we've got a board of directors and they're all voluntary roles. I see what they do and what they have to put up with, and it puts me off taking on a more serious governance role. Making decisions for the whole of the club, I wouldn't want to do that on a voluntary basis. [E2]

5.2.5   Contributing as a volunteer

Meaningful contribution

From analysing interview data, there was compelling evidence that golf club volunteering represented a significant and worthwhile activity for volunteers. As shall be illustrated below, the act of contributing as a volunteer was meaningful, because it was rooted in the routines and social relationships of membership. Being an established member provided the foundations for making a meaningful contribution.

A phrase often used by interviewees to describe their contribution as a volunteer was '*giving back*'. When asked to expand on what this meant, volunteers tended to reflect on the enjoyment that they obtain from the golf club and how they wanted to reciprocate. For example, a long-standing member described what her volunteering meant to her:

> *I just think it's giving something back to the club. In my view, I get a lot of enjoyment out of the club. I just think it's my way of giving something back to the club. [B2]*

A member for just over ten years described a similar desire to help a club that had brought him much enjoyment:

> *It's a payback from me to the club saying thanks very much, I'm really enjoying this club. I've got some experience behind me that I would now like to be able to pay back and help the club. [A1]*

A retired male golfer, who volunteered for course maintenance tasks, felt that there was an important link between contributing to the club and enjoying it:

> *If you just put a little bit more effort in, the better it is. You're getting that back when you come and play the golf course more often and we [retired members] do play it more often than people who are working. [C3]*

For these volunteers, as with all other interviewees, the golf club was important to them. As such, their contribution as a volunteer was meaningful. This sense of importance was amplified by their friendships within the golf club. As such, their contribution as a volunteer was enhanced because it was supporting both their own enjoyment and the enjoyment of their friends and fellow members. For example:

> *I like to give back. I've enjoyed joining the golf club, I've enjoyed the golf, I've enjoyed the social side of it, and I just thought I'll do something. [D1]*

Similarly, a volunteer at a small club said:

> *I'm just doing it for the benefit of the club, and so everyone can enjoy their time here. [E4]*

Another volunteer articulated the meaning he assigned to his volunteering by referring to 'our club':

> As far as I'm concerned, I'm giving something back to the club.
> I do believe in giving something back and if you have an ability
> to deliver something which I have been able to. It's <u>our</u> club at
> the end of the day. [C6]

Strong family and friendship ties within the club could be especially significant in enhancing the meaning of volunteering. A course maintenance volunteer talked about how his contribution was rooted in both family involvement and regard for the wider membership:

> With volunteering, I'm so passionate because I play, my wife
> plays, my son plays, we're all members here.
>
> Interviewer: So, who benefits from your volunteering?
>
> The members, I hope. Yes, the members. The benefit I got out
> of it was I got a bit fitter [laughter]. Digging all those ditches. I
> lost quite a bit of weight from around my waist. It got me out
> of the house, gave me something to do. I was happy, even in
> the rain, the wind. But, basically, it was because the overall
> membership would benefit. [B3]

Being deeply embedded within the golf club were fundamental to making the volunteering experience meaningful. With golf club membership playing a significant part in their lives, volunteering became worthwhile. Two examples from the data illustrate this well. The first is from a life-long sportsman, who found that golf provided a meaningful home for sporting participation as he grew older:

> I've played a host of sports for years. I want to carry on doing
> something active which is sociable, exercise, competitive…. of
> a sort. So the golf club allows me to do that. Obviously, I'm
> well established here now and I know lots of people. I feel it's a
> very welcoming place and somewhere I'm very happy to play
> and commit my time to. [C4]

Secondly, a golfer in his late 30s described how his friendships within the club underpinned his desire to contribute in a meaningful way:

> *Club championships is one thing I really set out to do. So when you have three times the numbers of players compared to three years ago and a clubhouse full of people for big presentations, it was just as you pictured the golf club would've been back in the '80s or '90s when there was a waiting list for membership and stuff like that. It was really rewarding to have a golf club full of people having a great time. That's why I was always a member there and so I just wanted to make that happen for our members. [E6]*

Modification goals

In becoming established members and now volunteers, interviewees had adapted to their golf club's way of doing things. They were broadly accepting of the golf club's practices and were happy following their own routines, usually with other members of a group. However, that is not to say that established members didn't find some aspects of golf club life disagreeable. As shall be illustrated below, some volunteers sought to make changes in their role.

As established members, volunteers felt more secure in their membership, which gave them a more secure platform from which to pursue change. Feeling comfortable as a member allowed interviewees to think less about how they fit and more about what changes they could make. They could think about how the golf club could be improved in line with their own needs and expectations. For example, one interviewee described how he felt able to exert some individualism in terms of what he wore in the clubhouse. He felt able to do this in the full knowledge that his choice of clothing met with the official dress code but broke the normative behavioural expectations of other members:

> *So here, we do operate a pretty relaxed, comfortable dress code. I come up here in my shorts and shoes without socks, and the comments and the looks you get sometimes. Look, I can walk into any golf club in America, any golf club in Europe,*

the top golf clubs in the world, I can walk into in this because it's smart casual wear. [A5]

As a club captain, this same individual felt able to challenge normative practices:

I suppose it's the freedom to do what I want to do. You get some people say to you…erm…this is a classic. There are some competitions that are mixed and so I do have a responsibility for running the mixed events. There's the mixed trophy event. And there's always a meal afterwards with the presentation and the captain has jacket and tie on. And in this very hot weather, people were saying are you dispensing with the jacket and tie? And I said I might do. And then one lady said "you can't, it's tradition. The captain wears a jacket and tie no matter what the weather". And I said, "well I think you'll find the captain has the freedom to do what the captain wants to do". As told to me. So, I said "I'll wear my jacket, but how long it will stay on for is another matter." [A5]

Volunteering was sometimes infused with strong intentions to challenge practices and pursue innovation. This was most common among volunteers with short membership and playing biographies. These volunteers more readily remembered the initial uncertainties they experienced as new members. They also remembered some of the challenges they had encountered when settling into the club. It is when these experiences had been problematic that interviewees appeared to consider more deeply the changes they would like to see in their golf club.

A desire to reshape the golf club is illustrated by a captain who felt that golf clubs tend to favour strong competitive golfers. She had been a golfer for less than 10 years and was a self-certified weak golfer. She described how, on taking up her captaincy, she planned to make a difference by supporting other less able golfers:

One thing I felt strongly about was that [less able golfers] are not always as visibly supported and valued. One thing I really wanted to do was to make as much of a fuss of them as the

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*more elite players. I felt that was important. That was one of
the things that I wanted to do. [C7]*

Where interviewees felt that they had relevant skills and experience, and
perceived other members to be supportive, they felt especially well placed to
pursue change. For example, a retired schoolteacher who had worked in some
challenging schools, observed how some of the golf club's practices were
inhibiting the participation and enjoyment of young golfers. He had been a
member for 3 years and integrated well but was still able to reflect critically on
aspects of the golf club. Now, as a director of the golf club, he wanted to create
a more positive experience for young golf club members:

*They were being stifled by the number of disciplinary meetings
that there were. These are good kids. These are nice kids.
They're nothing like the kids I'd been dealing with it for the
past 30 odd years. Why were there so many issues? Why was
there so much angst bubbling away under the surface? It was
because of the attitudes that were there. They were almost
like an inconvenience. Make way for the adults on the course.
You can't do this. You can't do that. If there's an adult coming,
you step aside and all that kind of business. Well, it's the 21st
century. [D2]*

He went on to say:

*I thought the club could maybe do with modernising its
attitudes basically. I thought that I could have a role to play in
just freeing it up. Sometimes you hear a golf club being
steeped in tradition. I've been involved in organisations where
tradition is important, but there's a difference between
tradition being important and tradition holding you back. I just
feel there was a little bit of the latter here. [D2]*

The change goals set by volunteers were linked to their socially situated
understanding of the golf club and their own experiences within it. Although
socialised within the golf club, this did not mean that socialisation was
wholesale. Some golf club practices could still conflict with a member's
expectations. It was possible to enjoy being a member and participate in

common practices, but also pursue some changes. Thus, in pursuing purposeful action as a volunteer, members were able to exert some agency.

5.3 Summary of findings

The findings about the club socialisation of volunteers, as outlined above, illustrate that membership experiences influence how members become volunteers. Furthermore, they illustrate how membership experiences shape the meaning of volunteering and the contribution that members make as volunteers.

By deploying theoretical coding, it is possible to arrange the various categories into a social process. The resulting club socialisation stages and transitions model is presented in Figure 9. This model illustrates the stages and transitions that a golf club member typically goes through to become a volunteer. The process provides a way of understanding how golf club volunteering is meaningful.

Figure 9 - Theoretical model of the club socialisation of volunteers in voluntary sports clubs

New member
- Unfamiliar with behavioural norms
- Relational uncertainty
- Playing uncertainty

Settling in
- Spending time at the club
- Social interaction
- Confidence in playing the sport

Established member
- Feeling comfortable
- Routine
- Group participation

Activation
- Social relationships
- Informed decision

Volunteer
- Meaningful contribution
- Modification goals
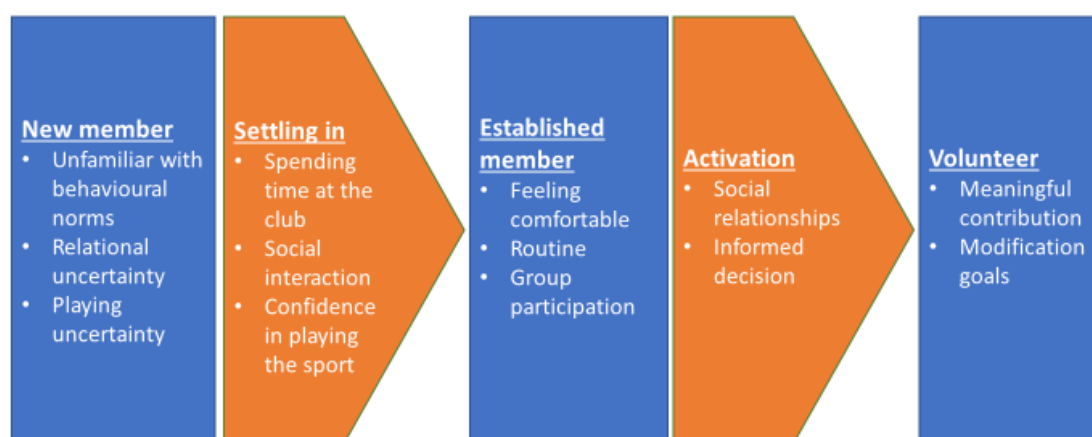
When interpreting this model, it is important to remember that it is rests mostly on the experiences of individuals that successfully made the two transitions, from new member to established member and then from established member

to volunteer. Not every golfer completes the process. Indeed, some of the data presented above shows how some interviewees left previous clubs before ever reaching the established member stage. Furthermore, some of the interviewees talked about the challenges they faced, especially as a new member and in settling in. The evidence therefore indicates that the social process is not always benign.

6 Findings on volunteer-member discussions

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents empirical findings on volunteer-member discussions within golf clubs. The findings show how associational golf club volunteers, in performing their voluntary roles, encounter more club members and are exposed to a range of opinions. The findings illustrate various features of volunteer-member discussions. They also show how volunteers respond to member communication and how they feel about them.

The findings on the features of volunteer-member discussions are arranged into five categories. Each category was formed through the grouping of initial codes into focussed codes. The focussed codes comprise: the issues discussed; access to reliable information; who is involved in the discussion; source of legitimacy; and, tone of the discussion. These focussed codes, which form the features of volunteer-member discussion, are illustrated over the coming pages with examples from the data.

After setting out the features of volunteer-member discussions, this findings section moves on to consider how volunteers respond to member communication and how their feelings are affected. Again, this analysis is formed through the grouping of initial codes into focussed codes. The codes of 'volunteers responding to members' and 'volunteer feelings from member discussions' are illustrated over the coming pages with extracts of qualitative data.

Table 21 below lists the initial and focused codes that underpin the analysis. The table also highlights the data sources that the codes were derived from.

Table 21 - Evidence base for codes on volunteer-member discussions

Grouping focussed codes	Focussed codes	Initial codes	Interviewees	Observation and documents
Features of volunteer-member discussions	The issues discussed	Discussing issues with members; listening to members moan; members raising trivial issues.	A1, A2, A3, A4, A5, A6, B1, B2, B3, B4, C1, C2, C4, C5, C6, C7, D1, D2, D3, E1, E2, E3, E4, E5, E6, E7	-
	Access to reliable information	Club provides information; members not reading information; misinformed members; members spreading rumours.	A1, A2, B1, B3, C2 D2, D3, E1, E2, E3, E4, E5	Observed provision of information at clubs A, B, C & D.
	Who is involved in the discussions	Encouraging member participation; involving members in discussion; identifying a vocal minority.	A3, A4, A5, B3, B4, C1, C4, C5, D2, D3, E1, E3, E5, E6	-
	Source of legitimacy	Recognising different perspectives; understanding other views; listening to the 'old guard'; criticising moaning members that don't volunteer; members exerting influence.	A1, A3, A4, B1, B4, C1, C5, D2, D3, E1, E2, E3, E5, E6	Observed high-status members exert influence in clubs A & B.
	Tone of the discussion	Respect from members; experiencing aggression; hostility from members.	A2, A4, A6, B3, B4, C1, C5, C7, D1, D2, E1, E3, E5, E6	Observed respect for volunteers in clubs A, C & D.
Volunteers responding to members	Welcoming constructive discussion	Discussing member concerns; promoting a balanced view; reaching agreement with members.	A1, A2, A3, A5, B2, B3, B4, C1, C2, C3, C5, C6, C7, D2, D3, D4, E1, E3, E4, E5, E6, E7	-
	Responding to moaning members	Tolerating moaning members; not responding to moaning members; challenging moaning members; difficult conversations with members.	A1, A2, A3, A4, A5, A6, B1, B3, C1, C2, C5, C6, C7, D2, D3, E1, E3, E4, E5, E6	-
Volunteer feelings from member discussions	Frustrated by member discussion	Frustrated by member moaning; disappointed by lack of member support; frustrated by member resistance.	A1, A2, A3, A4, A5, A6, B1, B2, B3, B4, C1, C2, C5, C6, C7, D1, D2, D3, E1, E2, E3, E4, E5, E6	Observed volunteer frustrations at clubs A, B & C.
	Feeling supported by members	Appreciating support from members; receiving recognition.	A1, A2, A3, A4, A5, A6, B1, B2, B3, C1, C3, C4, C5, C6, C7, D1, D2, D4, E3, E4, E6, E7	Observed volunteers enjoy recognition at club A.

Interview data was especially important in the analysis of volunteer-member discussions. All interviewees were current volunteers, which means their experiences of volunteer-member discussions were recent. The coding used some observational data, although observation data and document analysis were mainly used to understand the context for volunteer-member discussions.

A conceptual diagram, which visualises the features of volunteer-member discussions, is presented in Figure 10 at the end of this chapter on page 184. The diagram usefully distinguishes between the positive and negative aspects of volunteer-member discussions and frames these as being constructive and destructive.

6.2   The context for volunteer-member discussions

Throughout the interviews, volunteers were generally mindful that their golf clubs were democratic organisations, where members owned the club. Following on from this, volunteers recognised that members had a right to have a say in the running of their golf club, as illustrated by one club chairman:

> *As members, you have a say in how the club is run. You elect*
> *your management committee and, yeah, if you don't like what*
> *the majority agree, well yes you can leave and go elsewhere,*
> *but generally this is your club, this is your course, and you have*
> *a right to say what's going on. [A1]*

Most volunteers were also aware of how the operating environment for most golf clubs had changed. For those volunteers who had been playing golf for several decades, there was recognition that golf was no longer thriving in the same way as it had been towards end of the twentieth century. Up until the 1990s, when golf was booming, many golf clubs had full memberships and large income streams. Golf clubs were able to select new members and thus reserve membership for like-minded golfers. It was relatively easy to keep members happy because the membership was cohesive, and clubs had ample resources

to do what members wanted. One interviewee, a golfer for more than 30 years, explained:

> *[In the 1990s], we had a waiting list to join our club of about 125 people. Fees money was rolling in. We refurbished the clubhouse during that time. The members' needs were met while keeping the fees relatively low because obviously when you've got full membership, you can keep things going, so the members were as happy as Larry at that time. [E1]*

As many interviewees noted, golf clubs are now subject to a range of external pressures. Many golf clubs now face declining memberships and reduced incomes. Clubs also face external pressures from governing bodies, such as England Golf and the R&A, to become more inclusive (England Golf, 2017b, 2019, 2020; Fry and Hall, 2018; R&A, 2019a). Furthermore, with reduced incomes, golf clubs must consider more carefully how they spend their money. These pressures create tensions within golf clubs between those who wish to see change and those that prefer the status quo. This presents challenges in achieving democratic consensus among members. A Ladies Captain summed up the problem:

> *In any group of people, you'll always have differing opinions and differences about how things should be done. And sometimes that can get a bit onerous. You get the older members, the older people wanting it all to stay the same, stay as it's always been. You get newer blood, new people coming in, and they want to change things a bit. Both sides of the story have their merits. [A4]*

Volunteers sit at the heart of these debates and they often discuss issues among themselves. Members also talk to volunteers because volunteers play an active role in running the golf club. Volunteers in high profile and decision-making roles are especially prone to '*being collared*'. Thus, volunteers may be approached by members that they do not know. One board member explained:

There are far more people who know me by my name, more than I can recognise. I know who they are but not the names. I don't know whether that's an age thing or not, I don't know. People will come and talk to me, usually about an issue with the club and, more often than not, with an axe to grind. [D2]

6.3 The features of volunteer-member discussions

6.3.1 The issues discussed

Analysis of the research data highlighted how volunteers and members talk about a wide range of issues pertaining to their golf club. Common issues include the condition of the golf course; access to the course; membership fees; the dress code; the quality and cost of food and drink; and, priorities for capital expenditure. The condition of the golf course is generally considered an important topic of discussion within clubs, with the state of the greens and bunkers being particularly significant. Discussions on access to the course invariably revolve around the booking of tee times, the scheduling of play and pace of play. The cost of membership can also be a significant issue, especially when members perceive that other members are receiving favourable treatment. The provision of discounted membership fees to young golfers and new members, and the introduction of flexible membership fees, are of particular issue as golf clubs seek to attract new members. The club's dress code is another hotly debated topic. Depending on each members' point of view, changes to the dress code reflect either a deterioration of standards or a welcome move towards modernity. The quality and cost of food and drink are important to those that socialise in the clubhouse. Poor value-for-money is a common source of annoyance. Finally, within all golf clubs, decisions must be made on how the club spends its money. Members have many different and varied views on priorities. Options include course improvements, clubhouse improvements, or reining in capital expenditure to keep membership fees down.

In addition to the most common discussion topics, there are many other issues that members discuss with volunteers. These issues may be particular to a section or group within the golf club. For instance, in the juniors section, junior organisers may be asked by parents to explain and justify team selections. In the seniors' section, members may complain to the seniors' captain about the slow pace of play. Thus, some topics of conversation can be particular to each volunteer's role.

Volunteers formed views as to whether the issues were significant or trivial. While this was subjective and dependent on personal perspective, volunteers consistently identified some issues as significant. Golf club capital expenditure was one such issue and was usually deemed worthy of debate. For example, one volunteer described how his golf club had received a significant VAT rebate which led to extensive discussions between the board and the members around how that money should be spent:

> *We had a bit of argy-bargy because we wanted to reinvest that money into the clubhouse and refurbish it. Some of the members wanted the money back themselves because they had paid the VAT themselves. So there were a few meetings at which we were trying to put forward our view about reinvesting the money in the club and there was this group of members that were wanting to say, "No, you should be paying us this money back." We had quite a lot of discussion around that. [E1]*

There was less agreement about what constituted trivial issues. Triviality was a matter of perspective. Nevertheless, interviewees described many occasions when members asked them to deal with inconsequential matters. These were matters that had no significant bearing on member's enjoyment of their club. For example, a lady captain described the typical content of a trivial complaint:

> *It's always little things. That's the frustration. It's like [sighs]: "Whilst I've got you here, can I just say?" It's just little things. "Why is the curtain not up in the changing room?" It's that kind of stuff. Little things. [C7]*

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In two of the case study golf clubs, there were issues regarding the coffee machine, which some members complained about incessantly. For those volunteers on the receiving end of complaints, it was difficult to take them seriously. In both cases, the coffee machines had been acquired under long lease contracts and the financial penalties for early return were prohibitive. There wasn't much that the volunteers could do about it and, from their perspective, not serving premium coffee-shop product was hardly a critical and defining feature of the golf club.

While volunteers considered certain matters trivial, the same matters could have significant symbolic meaning to some members. The dress code was a good example of this. For some volunteers, it wasn't a major issue, but for other members, it played an essential role in shaping standards of behaviour within the golf club. One long-standing golfer explained the dress code issue and how his own attitudes were often conflicted:

> *The dress code is a hornet's nest at golf clubs all over the place now. I'm still of the old school. I like the standards of dress at the golf club, but [the club] tended to feel that we had to relax them a little bit because of the area that we were in. It's stupid things really. When you look back at it, you think, "Oh my God, does it really matter that somebody comes in in a smart pair of jeans or not a pair of jeans?" [E1]*

Although there was variation in the topics considered to be trivial, there was broad consistency in how volunteers conceived of triviality. In volunteers' eyes, to raise a point that was trivial was to '*moan*', and those that did it were '*moaning members*'. Across the golf clubs in this study, volunteers frequently used the '*moaning*' term to convey their disdain for what they regarded as petty issues.

6.3.2 Access to reliable information

Volunteer-member discussions are based on information and the quality of that information has implications for the quality of the discussions. It is therefore significant that, across this study's golf clubs, there was much variety in the quality of information put at the disposal of members. While full and accurate information was sometimes available, misinformation was also common.

With large and socially active memberships, golf clubs are fertile breeding grounds for generating misinformation and spreading rumours. Members talk while playing golf and chat in the bar afterwards. As information is relayed among members, it can quickly become distorted, embellished and recast. One interviewee, a longstanding member of golf clubs, describes the process with wry amusement:

> *The golf club is a great place for rumours to be pushed around. I mean, you'll be sitting in there having a drink, and you can hear people going, "Have you heard what's happening?" We had a classic tale and we still laugh about it now. We put some ponds in when we refurbished one of the holes, which the members were a bit iffy about. Some ducks made themselves at home on the thing and one of the board members, as he was playing with one of the members that moans, said: "Have you seen the ducks we bought to put in the pond?" We obviously hadn't bought them, but it was made out that we bought these ducks to put in the pond. He didn't respond well: "They effing fly off, what the effing hell are you doing!" Well, the rumour went around the golf club. We were like, "it's a joke", but yeah. [E1]*

The way that members form opinions based on partial information was a common concern of volunteers. Members are rich in experience but not necessarily in expertise. What may seem like a straightforward matter may mask considerable complexity. The management of the golf course is one such issue, as one Greens Chairman described:

Bunkers, this is what everybody complains about at every club, all the members complain about the bunkers. They look at the Masters, and they see these beautifully kept bunkers, and they see the professionals go in, and then the ball comes out, and it lands near the flag. They go, "well, it doesn't do it when I hit it, it must be the fault of the bunkers." Not the fact that these guys spend eight hours a day practising continuously plus the fact that one man looks after seven bunkers. [Augusta's] bunkers are humidity controlled with automatic moisture sensors. They're covered up every night with sheets of tarp. They don't see that. Sorry, I rub it on, but you talk to any Greens Chairman and they will all have the same stories about bunkers. [D3]

Similarly, a golf club board member explained how members mistakenly think quick fixes are possible on golf courses:

People think it's easy to go ahead and make the greens 10% faster. "It's easy to make the greens faster. It's easy to do this." They don't realise the prior work that has to be put into it. [C2]

For many volunteers, listening to members regurgitate misinformation was a tiresome feature of being a volunteer. It was, however, possible to minimise the incidence of ill-informed views by providing members with reliable information. The provision of reliable information helped to counteract the spread of rumour and misinformation. In this regard, club management could establish solid foundations for volunteer-member discussions by providing reliable information to members.

Club C was particularly good at communicating with its members. The club published its vision, mission, values, strategy and board meeting minutes on its website. The provision of strategic information had the effect of solidifying understanding and support from members. The club published committee meeting minutes, which aided transparency. They were similarly proactive in

providing members with information about the maintenance and improvement works planned for the golf course. A club board member explained:

> *At the end of the summer this year, there wasn't a lot of the sand in the bunkers. All right, so let's get a quick win. Let's buy some sand. A thousand pound, buy a load of sand and put it in the bunkers, keep everybody happy. So we go to the greenkeepers, "go and get the sand, whatever you need". Well, it's not as simple as that. You can't just dump some sand into the bunkers……. No, we've got to make sure the drains are working, everything else is working. Otherwise, it's going to clog up again…….. You go back to the members with the reasons. Yes, we bought sand and we'll do the bunkers one at a time. You explain to them the reasons why it has to be done in stages. Everybody's happy then, and you don't get the complaints. [C2]*

Of course, making reliable information available did not necessarily mean that everyone consumed it. This was demonstrated by a conversation that the researcher had with the General Manager at Club D:

> *[The General Manager] told me a story about how golf club members maintain habits despite multiple communications to inform them of changes. The Manager had changed the course order on Thursday afternoons, with the back 9 being played first on each alternative week. He made the change to accommodate a group of women golfers that only played 9 holes. The Manager had advertised this change via an e-newsletter to all members, a notice at the top of all online bookings for Thursday afternoons and a notice displayed on the first tee. Despite all this, a group of male golfers had started their round from the 1st tee and then got annoyed when they found a group of ladies in front of them from the 10th tee. They 'ranted' at the ladies for getting in their way and later came to complain to the Manager. He pointed out that he had taken multiple measures to advertise the changes and that if the men had read any of these, there wouldn't have been a problem. [Researcher observation notes]*

The provision of information to members allowed volunteers to refer members to it. For example, a volunteer board member described how her golf club was cutting down trees to preserve its historic heathland character and improve playing conditions. She described how, despite the head greenkeeper posting a regular blog that explained the changes, members would still moan:

> *So they say "you are digging up all the trees, it's not going to help the drainage". Well, no, they are deciduous trees, so they are dormant in the winter. When you want the moisture to come up, they are not taking up any water. They're only taking up the water when you need it in the ground. "Oh yes, I hadn't thought of that". Yes, there's a lot of ignorance, which is frustrating when the club has made an effort to put the information out there. [A2]*

In such situations, the volunteer was at least able to refer members on to the expert's blog:

> *All the information is put out there and it's there for members if they want to read it. Some people moan, but I'd say, "did you read [the greenkeeper's] blog?" [A2]*

Another interviewee described a similar approach taken by his golf club to update members on daily course maintenance tasks:

> *We've now got a dedicated greens communication board where [the head greenkeeper] puts up: "What I've done last week, what I'm doing this week, what my plan is for next week. This is my three-month plan in terms of when I'm going to be hollow coring, what fertiliser I'm going to be spraying, what weed killers, when I'm going to do this, when I'm going to do that". Now when someone sits there and goes: "Well it's ridiculous, there's loads of clover out on the golf course", we say "Look at the greens communication board, you can see that's on [the greenkeeper's] list of jobs to do this week, he's aware of it. You don't need to shout at everyone in the bar about how much clover there is, and how ridiculous it is that you lost a ball in it. We know about it, we're dealing with it". It's just raising awareness that that board's there with all that information on it about what we're doing as a golf club. [E3]*

Thus, where golf clubs were good at communicating information to members, volunteers were able to use this as a supportive framework for their interactions with members.

6.3.3   Who is involved in the discussions

Member discussions within golf club tended to be dominated by a vocal minority. The vocal minority typically comprised older males, long-time golfers and longstanding members. A club captain explained:

> *There are some frustrating members. You can probably count them on one hand. There are just a few members, who have been here a long time, can remember days when it was slightly different and think it should be different, and moan like hell about it. [A5]*

Some volunteers realised that the domination of club discourse by a minority of members could be exclusionary. They, therefore, made efforts to listen to a broader cross-section of members. For example, the same club captain was keen to talk to women golfers at his club where less than 1 in 8 members were female:

> *One of the main things I did was make sure that I talk with all the ladies. They'll tell you in the shop, on Thursdays, it can take me 20 minutes sometimes to walk from the car park up to the pro-shop because of the ladies on Thursdays chatting to me. I've made a point of getting on with all of them. [A5]*

Similarly, another club captain tried to make himself available to everyone:

> *I introduced that once a month the officials of the club would be in the clubhouse on a Friday evening, and anybody could come along and chat. That helped people start coming to talk to us. [E1]*

Efforts to engage with the membership beyond the vocal minority were not always successful though. For example, a seniors captain described his disappointment at the muted response to his request for feedback on how the seniors' section could be improved. Although silence seemed to imply that the majority were content with the management of the seniors' section, it was disconcerting:

> *In my time as seniors captain, the only thing I have failed to do is increase participation despite trying to get some feedback. It was more of a 'go away and leave me alone. I'm happy doing what I'm doing' response. Enough seniors patted me on the head, committee members that have been here a long time, and said "we expected that, don't worry, it's not you, it's not a personal thing. People are happy doing what they are doing".* [A3]

Similarly, a volunteer board member reflected that the majority of members seemed content to let the board get on with running the club as long as they did a good job:

> *Maybe the membership thinks, "we voted them in, so let them get on with it. They will sort it out. Why do we need to get involved?"* [C1]

As such, it was sometimes difficult for volunteers to achieve inclusivity in member discussions. If the majority were happy with how things were, they would invariably remain a silent majority. As shall be discussed later, this had implications for whether volunteers felt supported or not. If the majority are happy, it was helpful if volunteers heard this and to know that the vocal minority did not speak for everyone.

6.3.4   Source of legitimacy

In talking to volunteers, members sought to legitimise their point of view based on their individual status or the rationale of their argument. With regards the former, volunteers described how some members drew on their high status to

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make challenging comments about how the club was being run. Typically, members perceived high status to be derived from: golfing ability; length of membership; and, previously holding an important volunteer role. High status was often associated with members that had held the club's most senior voluntary positions, such as club captain or board member. Several interviewees referred to these members as '*the old guard*'.

A club captain described how a former club captain drew upon his prior official status as a source of legitimacy when criticising a club event:

> *One of the old past captains was at the New Year's Eve dinner thing, and he said to me, he said, "This place is going down the pan." I said, "What do you mean, going down the pan?" He said, "Well, look at it." He said, "When I was captain here 20 years ago, this night we would have had 160 here". He said, "We've got 80 here tonight." Just going on with himself. I just said to him, "Well." I said, "Why do you think that's the case?" And he went like, "They're idiots here. They don't know what they're doing." And I took some real offence to that. [E5]*

Similarly, a volunteer board member described how there was a small group of high-status members in his golf club known as the '*big seven*'. The group was made up of past captains, first-team players and longstanding members. The volunteer described how they used their status to influence debates within the golf club:

> *They're the members who are… I'd describe it as holding court. You walk in the bar, and as you come in our spikes bar, by the window, there's a nice bench in the alcove, and they'll be sitting in the middle of the bench, their arms crossed, leaning back and everyone's leaning in and listening to them talk about how it used to be perfect, and how it used to be this, and if we'd just done this and this and that, and what we probably need is a new greenkeeper, and so on and so forth. [E3]*

That some of the most vocal and critical members were past captains was a source of frustration to some volunteers. It seemed unfair that having once performed the role, and knowing how difficult it could be, they were still unreasonably critical. A club captain described his disappointment:

> *The biggest moaners, I found, are the people that had been in the same position ten, twenty years ago. The old past captains and stuff. So, yeah, it's quite a surprise. I just think life is different and people are different now compared to 25 years ago and golf, that's certainly different. Some of these guys would do well to remember it. [E6]*

Volunteers themselves sometimes drew on their own high status to engage with other volunteers and members and garner support. A young adult volunteer that supported the junior section described how her club's junior organiser used his reputation to build support for the juniors section:

> *The junior organiser is a member – he's been a member for quite a few years. He's a regular senior team player. He knows a lot of the members and that helps. When there are familiar faces involved, it helps get members' acceptance and support. [E2]*

Volunteers often made judgments about whether a member was worth listening to based on who they were. Volunteers were inclined to ignore two types of member, namely: the perennial complainers; and, members that criticised but never volunteered.

The '*perennial moaner*' was someone who was unreasonable in complaining about anything and everything. There was seemingly no way to please them. For many volunteers, it wasn't worth listening to them. As one volunteer joked:

> *You never please everybody. You could say to a certain group of members, we'll give you free subs for a year and we'll buy you a car, and they'll still complain. They'll still say, "Yes, but I don't like the colour." [E5]*

Members that regularly complained but were *'unwilling to volunteer'* was a particular source of annoyance to volunteers. These were members that would simply complain if they didn't like something but were unwilling to do anything about the issue. Some volunteers put this down to growing consumerist culture. They felt that expectations of collective effort had given way to consumerism, where membership merely represented the payment of fees rather than subscription to a mutual organisation. Membership had thus taken on a purely economic and transactional nature whereby the member had paid fees in return for services rendered. These members complained when they failed to experience services at the expected level. They appeared to feel no obligation to contribute to the production of club services. For some volunteers, who valued the associational nature of their golf club, the failure of complaining members to put themselves forward to volunteer rendered their criticisms illegitimate. If they were not prepared to contribute themselves and help to resolve issues, then they forfeited the right to moan to a volunteer. They should either *'put up or shut up'*.

To illustrate this, one longstanding volunteer was critical of how a group of male golfers that socialised in the *'back bar'* would consistently criticise how the golf club was run but never took any action themselves:

> *They sit in the back room and they're all like, "We should do this. We should do that." They just sit and moan all the time but are not prepared to help or go on a committee or anything. Because on the council, they've been short this year, so if they wanted to do something, they could say, "Oh, well I'll come on, you can co-opt me onto the council and I'll go on marketing or--" but they don't. They just sit and moan. [B1]*

Among the volunteers interviewed, there was frequent disappointment that not enough members justified their opinions through informed argument. Volunteers were generally desirous of reasoned debates with members. They were passionate about their golf club and wanted to see improvements.

Volunteers were keen to listen to constructive input from members and explore ideas through discussion. More reasoned debate with members would have been welcomed.

6.3.5   The tone of the discussion

In the main, volunteers described how members behaved cordially in their conversations. There seemed to be respect from members for those that volunteered, and so discussions were held civilly. On rare occasions, however, volunteers felt that the tone of members was unduly aggressive. Volunteers described members approaching and speaking to them in a hostile manner. Interviewees used vivid terms to describe members talking to them in an aggressive way, including: '*coming at me*'; '*screaming*'; and, '*shouting*'. Discussions occasionally became heated. One volunteer board member explained how facing such hostility could be upsetting:

> *Sometimes people can be quite rude. Under normal*
> *circumstances, people are quite reasonable, but if something*
> *presses their button, they can be quite rude, quite aggressive*
> *at times. Some of the members of the board have been a little*
> *upset by it. [D2]*

While experiences like this were not common among volunteers, there was a generally recognised risk that member discussions could get out of hand if not handled with care. In Club B, for instance, the general tone of the debate appeared quarrelsome and there were multiple reports of volunteers resigning on the back of heated exchanges. Similarly, one interviewee spoke of how, in the past, debates within his golf club had become overheated and hostile, with negative consequences:

> *We went through a stage at the golf club of great turmoil back*
> *in 2016 when the captain who -- our captains go on the board*
> *of directors -- and the captain got involved in a lot of things he*
> *shouldn't have done and rubbed a hell of a lot of people the*
> *wrong way. It all got a bit hateful to be honest, a bit spiteful*

for the golf club to the point where everyone on the board stepped down. [E3]

6.4 Volunteer responses to member discussion

Further to setting out above the characteristics of volunteer-member discussions, this section explores how volunteers responded. The analysis shows that the response tended to depend on whether the volunteer viewed each member's communication positively or negatively.

6.4.1 Managing moaning members

Some volunteers appeared adept at dealing with negative communication from members. They described how they managed and contained difference, and were able to do this without getting unduly stressed or uptight. They were able to see the bigger picture and not get vexed by the trivial. The ability to disarm members that engaged in destructive discussion was a particularly effective response. For example, a board member talked about how he would disarm '*moaning members'* and encourage them to think rationally:

> *It's just the way how you deal with people. If somebody comes, first my reaction is I'll just let them let the steam off, let it all come out and then say, "Right. Well, what we're trying to do is we're trying to achieve this. Do you think that's a good idea?"*
>
> *"Yes."*
>
> *"We're trying to do that. That's a good idea, isn't it?""*
>
> *If they say no, then they're making themselves look a little silly. So you put it "right, that's what we're trying to do. You might feel uncomfortable about it, but just let's just get on with it and see what it's like in the future". [D2]*

For many volunteers, an appropriate and justified response to a *'moaning member'* was not to take them seriously. It was just a case of listening to, but

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not doing anything about, the points raised. Thus, volunteers were able to set aside destructive member communication.

Where member discussion was of doubtful significance, volunteers could use reliable information and reasoned argument to make their case and conclude what might otherwise become destructive discussion. For example, a seniors captain described how he was able to quell members' concerns by asking them to consider the bigger picture:

> *I've had one or two seniors say: 'Why do you pick them, you know they can't play to their handicap because they're too old. If you partner me with them, I'm never going to win'. And I'm like well: 'They're friendly matches. The purpose of seniors friendly matches is the opportunity to go and play at another club and for them to play here, and the opportunity just to meet some people of a similar age and probably a similar background who are from a different club, and just to make new friends, enjoy a round of golf, enjoy a meal afterwards, have a bit of fun. [A3]*

Volunteers were not, however, always able to maintain a dispassionate and controlled response. Occasionally, volunteers became so irritated with destructive member discussion that they responded destructively. This didn't always end well. For example, a club captain described how he challenged a member who complained incessantly, which led to a heated exchange:

> *I suggested to one of them last year….I've known him for years…..it was getting quite heated, and I said to him "if you really are that frustrated and it really frustrates you that much, then why do you pay to renew every year. Why don't you find a course that you enjoy? So I'm not telling you to bugger off or anything, but why don't you find somewhere that you can enjoy, so that you can enjoy your golf, rather than moaning to everyone else about it". Basically! And all hell let loose after that one! You know, "the vice-captain's told me where to go". [A5]*

There were risks to engaging seriously with 'moaning members'. Acquiescing to destructive member discussion risked validating it. Pandering to destructive member discussion also risked escalating an issue beyond what it deserved. A club captain illustrated this by describing how volunteers at his golf club had, in the past, encouraged complaining members to put their concerns in writing to the board. This had the unhelpful effect of validating their petty concerns:

> *For many, many years, as a club, we pandered to it. If there was a little bit of bar room tittle-tattle around something, then we pandered to it. The secretary would write a letter to them and stuff like that saying, "We respect your concerns." And don't get me wrong, we fully respect the people's concerns, but we were our own worst enemy because we would carry that on. We'd take that to a committee meeting a month later and then we'd then write back to them. So what was an issue, a five-minute issue over there, with just having a beer with people, having a laugh, then becomes like, two months down the line, we're then bringing that up again, and we're putting it in writing. We're writing back to them two months later. They'd forgotten about all that, but we're then bringing it back into play. It's stuff like that we had to stop because it was destroying the atmosphere in the place. These people were written back to, and they would then bring the letter back into the bar and say, "Look at this here, look at this, ridiculous, nothing's improved." [E5]*

6.4.2   Welcoming constructive discussion

Where matters raised by members were significant, it was much easier for volunteers to respond constructively. For example, one club chairman emphasised how it was necessary to engage constructively with members about capital expenditure plans so that they understood the reasons for the decisions made. He said:

> *There needs to be a rationale and a reason because 500 odd members out there will have their own view. Why do you pick one project over another project? If you've got information to back up your report it makes it a damn sight easier when you*

*talk to the rest of the members about it. If I know that they
don't understand, then I am prepared to talk to them about it
and say the reasons why certain things are happening. [A1]*

Constructive discussion was desirable because it encouraged volunteers and members alike to test their arguments and see if they stood up to reason and reality. It ensured that volunteers and members felt listened to and that others took their viewpoints seriously. It afforded volunteers the opportunity to persuade members of their point of view. It also provided opportunities for the formation of balanced opinions. While consensus between opposing views was not always possible, engagement in constructive discussion enhanced the possibility of reaching some form of compromise. For example, a volunteer club captain described how his golf club overcame tensions between the traditionalists and modernisers through a rational discussion:

*It's a very traditional golf club, but thankfully our older
members have accepted a lot of what they would term
progressive changes, what I would term as keeping up with
the times. Things like wearing jeans in the clubhouse, trainers
in the clubhouse and all stuff like that. These old guys were
members when you had to wear a jacket and tie in the
clubhouse after six o'clock and stuff like that and reminisce
about the days of the men's bar and don't want the food menu
changed and complain if the prices go up 10p, when the
younger guys perhaps will accept that's a way of life. But you
know what, generally, everyone is pretty supportive because
our golf club has been through a lot of financial hardship over
the years and what we're good at doing is making them
realise that if we don't change we'll struggle. [E6]*

6.5 Impact on volunteers: frustrated or supported

The nature of volunteer-member discussions and the response of volunteers are important because they affect how volunteers feel about their volunteering. Communications with members influenced how volunteers evaluated their role and their achievements. The findings presented in this section show how

volunteers feel supported by constructive discussion, whereas destructive discussion fosters frustration.

6.5.1   Frustrated by member discussion

For some volunteers, destructive discussions with members harmed their enjoyment of golf. For example, one interviewee described how his experience of destructive conversations while club captain impinged on his enjoyment of playing golf:

> *I used to come up to play my golf on a Sunday to play in the competitions and you get accosted in the car park, "Mr. Captain, why is this being done? Why is this being done?" You have to stand and explain and so your golf for that day is affected........ I'd then be thinking about it all the way round when I'm playing golf. I did let it get to me. [E1]*

Incessant exposure to destructive member discussion could sour volunteers' enjoyment of their golf club. For example, a volunteer board member described the draining effect of members complaining:

> *When I'm trying to play golf, it does have a wearing effect for sure, especially in times of real change like last year when the weather went ridiculously hot and bad for us. Every time we went down to the golf club people were screaming about the condition of the course because it was too bouncy and too hard, and the greens were dying and this and that and duh-duh-duh. You're sitting there thinking why do I want to go down. I want to enjoy playing my golf but I know what I'm going to hear is noise. I'm sitting there and I know the reasons for it. [E3]*

More often than not, it was misinformed and careless comments that caused the most volunteer frustration, as one greens chairman described:

> *I get frustrated when there's misinformation. Whether people do it maliciously or not, I don't know, but sometimes you'll hear people say things. You won't hear the source of the*

> *rumour, but you'll hear the rumour several people down the*
> *line, and that upsets me. [D3]*

One interviewee, a female in her twenties that had been volunteering with the junior section, reflected on the challenging member communications environment in her golf club. She had observed the '*backlash*' that the golf club's board members frequently endured and wondered how it seemed unfair:

> *The board has to make big decisions, about financial things,*
> *about running the golf club. You can't please everyone. And I*
> *know a lot of other golf clubs have a similar problem. You*
> *can't please everyone, yet all our members expect to be*
> *pleased. So, it's an unforgiving job. They take a lot of backlash*
> *all the time, and they are volunteers! They are giving up their*
> *time to hold these positions in the golf club and they don't get*
> *a lot of thanks for it. Their job is made hard because the club*
> *has so many members who all have an idea about what they*
> *think should happen and how things should be run. And when*
> *they're not happy, they all seem to be very vocal about it. [E2]*

Volunteers would invariably attempt to rationalise their experience. They reminded themselves that only a minority of members moaned. They tried to overlook moaning members by saying '*some people are just like that'*. They told themselves that coping with moaning members was just a part of being a volunteer. Since destructive member discussions seemed inherent to their role, volunteers felt it necessary to find the inner resources to deal with it. In their view, it required an ability not to get upset or offended by the things that members said. This was neatly summed up by a junior organiser:

> *You realise what a pain in the neck some of the other people*
> *are. You have to learn to deal with the fact you can never*
> *make them happy. You have to grow a bit of a thick skin over*
> *it really. [C7]*

Interviewees invariably sought to rationalise their experience in this way. It is possible that, as part of the interview process, they sought to present a positive

image of their experience to the researcher. On the odd occasion, however, through observing life at the golf clubs, it was possible to see how member moaning got under the skin of some volunteers:

> *In the morning, a volunteer who I had previously interviewed came up the stairs into the bar area. He spoke to two other volunteers to say that he had just been speaking to [a member] who was moaning about various things. The volunteer didn't appear as calm and composed as when I had interviewed him. Referring to the member, he said "ah, he really does my head in". The others then discussed how there will always be some members who will moan and that it was almost impossible to satisfy them. They said "we just ignore him" and everyone laughed knowingly at this. [Researcher observation notes]*

While interviewees tended to talk a lot about the frustration of *'moaning members'*, a lack of constructive engagement by the *'silent majority'* of members was also frustrating. If the majority of members were content but remained silent, then moaning was all that volunteers heard. Some volunteers felt as if members didn't care. Volunteers regretted the absence of constructive discussions because it made their volunteering efforts seem less important. For example, one grounds maintenance volunteer was frustrated by how members didn't engage in constructive conversations about how the course could be improved:

> *If you look at all those tasks in the clubhouse and out on the course, there are very few members who actually say "well, you're doing a great job there, carry on". Very few. They're not interested, they just want to play their game of golf because it's a Tuesday morning and they always play at nine o'clock on Tuesday morning. They don't care. That's a frustration to me. Why don't they see the things that I can see? [B3]*

If the majority of members remain silent, then the minority of moaning members could dominate the volunteer experience. It was sometimes difficult for volunteers to keep this in mind when they were so deeply involved:

It's just some people's personalities. They just are moaners really. Looking back on it, with a touch of hindsight, that was a much smaller part of the experience than the positive stuff, but at the time, it didn't always feel like that. [C7]

6.5.2   Feeling supported by members

For most volunteers, the increased communication with members that came with their role provided an opportunity to meet and engage with more people. Getting to know more people was a positive feature of being a volunteer. If communication was constructive, it provided a basis for a supportive environment. Constructive member discussions conveyed a sense that members had consented to the actions of the volunteer. A club chairman summarised this by saying:

> *It is important that I've got the support of the members who are aware of what is going on, the people that have involved themselves in the club, even if they don't agree with it all. [A1]*

The degree to which member communications were perceived to be constructive influenced volunteers' attitudes towards their golf club. Volunteers' feelings about their golf club were enhanced when members communicated constructively with volunteers about their work and the future direction of the golf club. It gave volunteers a sense that they shared a common purpose with their fellow members. For example, a club captain described his pleasure at receiving member support for his plans for a mixed-gender competition:

> *I was really interested to see what [my fellow male members] would say about a joint competition. Actually, it was unanimous agreement that: "Yes, of course, let's play a joint competition with them". There was no question and that was really encouraging for me actually, really encouraging, especially as we have separate men's and ladies' committees and there's a lot of moaning from both about each other. It was really good to hear. [E6]*

Volunteers felt a strong sense of support if members overtly acknowledged their contribution. Although they rarely asked for or expected it, volunteers generally appreciated some form of recognition. A junior organiser summed up a common attitude among volunteers:

> *I don't expect to have recognition in the sense that I don't want to have awards or anything like that, but it's just nice to have the feedback saying, "You know what, you're doing a really good job" or "the juniors are fantastic." [C6]*

Among the case study golf clubs, it seemed as though a tendency towards constructive discussions not only helped support volunteers but also helped clubs to address problems and develop effective solutions. Club C appeared to be a particularly good example where constructive discussions with members helped volunteers to successfully restructure their organisation. Through active engagement with members, discussing options and solutions, the club's board had developed a strong vision and strategic plan. Importantly, through engaging with members, the volunteers on the board felt confident that they had the support of the members:

> *[The board] takes some pride in that we got it through last year's AGM to become a member's club and get everybody on board with it. No dissent whatsoever when the vote was taken. Everybody said they were pleased with the hard work we'd been doing. They trusted us to do the best for the club. [C1]*

6.6   Summary of findings

In summary, communication with members is an important feature of the volunteer experience. The findings outlined above have described the nature of the discussions that volunteers have with members in golf clubs. Five key features of volunteer-member discussions are suggested by the analysis, including: the issues discussed; access to reliable information; who is involved in

the discussions; source of legitimacy; and tone of the discussion. The analysis also identified positive and negative aspects of volunteer-member discussions. It is suggested that these contrasting aspects can be usefully described as constructive and destructive discussions.

Figure 10 below illustrates the five dimensions of volunteer-member discussions and how each of them can tend towards either constructive or destructive communication.

Figure 10 – The dimensions of volunteer-member discussions and how they affect volunteers
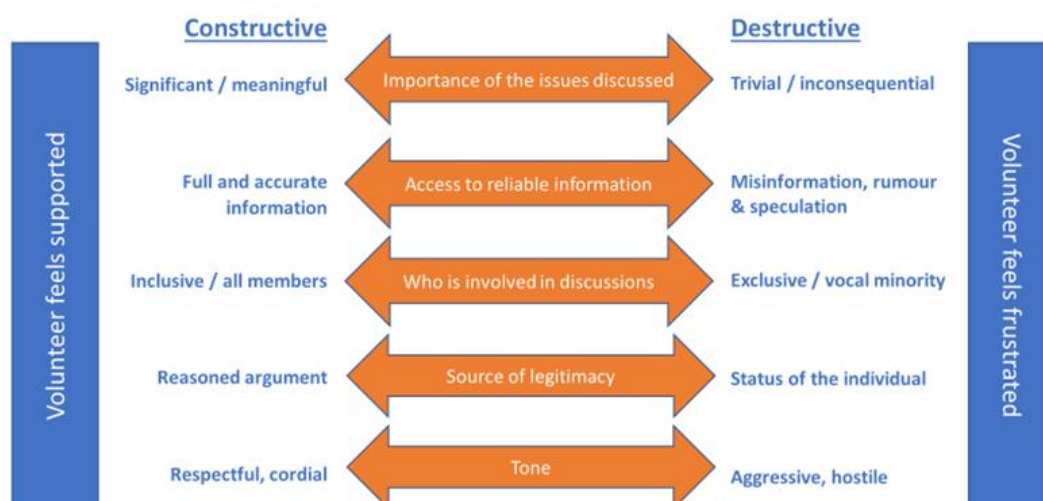
By describing how volunteers respond to and are affected by member discussion, it has been possible to illustrate how the nature of member discussion influences the experience of golf club volunteers. If volunteer-member discussions are constructive, volunteers tend to feel supported. However, destructive volunteer-member discussions pervade all golf clubs and are a source of frustration to volunteers. Low levels of destructive discussion and high levels of constructive discussion helps to maintain a positive volunteer experience and sustain volunteers' enthusiasm for their club and its members.

7 Findings on affective club commitment

7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents empirical findings on the affective club commitment of golf club volunteers. The term affective club commitment is used to capture the feelings that volunteers have towards their golf club. The findings show how volunteers' feelings reflect their experiences within the golf club, including their social relationships and their voluntary contributions. The findings also illustrate how volunteers' feelings towards their golf clubs are complex and combine varied perceptions of who and what is meaningful.

The findings on affective club commitment are arranged into three categories. Each category was formed through the grouping of initial codes into focussed codes. The focussed codes comprise: a sense of belonging; a feeling of involvement; and, pride in the club. These focussed codes, which form the three key dimensions of affective club commitment, are illustrated over the coming pages with examples from the data.

Table 22 lists the initial and focussed codes that underpin the analysis. The table also highlights the data sources that the codes were derived from. Interview data was especially important in the analysis of affective club commitment. This is because interviews provided the opportunity to explore in-depth how volunteers felt about their golf club. The coding used some observational data, especially for 'pride in the club' because the outward-facing expression of pride was sometimes visible in volunteers. In the main, however, observation and document analysis were mostly used to understand the context for volunteers' feelings around affective club commitment.

A conceptual diagram, which visualises the dimensions of affective club commitment, is presented in Figure 11 at the end of this chapter on page 204. The diagram illustrates the dimensions of affective club commitment in a

pyramid to reflect the way that commitment builds up from the foundations of belonging, develops through involvement and, in due course, transcends into pride in the club.

Table 22 - The evidence base for codes on affective club commitment

Focussed codes	Initial codes	Interviewees	Observation and documents
A sense of belonging (especially to a group of members)	Describing the club as the membership; describing the club as friendly; valuing friendship; feeling part of a group of members.	A1, A2, A3, A4, A5, A6, B1, B2, B3, B4, C1, C2, C3, C4, C5, C6, C7, D1, D2, D3, D4, E1, E2, E3, E4, E5, E6, E7	-
Feeling of involvement (especially from contributing)	Contributing to the club; proud of contributions made; feeling a part of the club; enjoying recognition for contributions made.	A1, A3, A5, A6, B2, B3, C1, C2, C3, C4, C5, C6, C7, D1, D2, D4, E2, E3, E4, E5, E6, E7	-
Pride in the club	Proud of the golf club (course, members, achievements); wanting others to perceive their club positively; making positive comparisons to other clubs; appreciating external recognition of the club.	A1, A2, A3, A4, A5, A6, B1, B2, B3, C1, C2, C3, C4, C5, C6, C7, D1, D2, E1, E2, E3, E4, E5, E6, E7	Observation at all clubs.

7.2 The features of affective club commitment

7.2.1 A sense of belonging

During the semi-structured interviews, many volunteers said that they felt a sense of belonging to their golf club. Indeed, when volunteers talked about their golf club, it was noticeable how frequently they used the term '*we*'. This was indicative of how volunteers self-classified as belonging to their club. However, in using the term '*we*', it was sometimes ambiguous as to what they meant by themselves and '*the club*'. That said, the most frequently cited understanding of what constituted the club was the other members.

Intriguingly, as part of the interview, volunteers were asked '*how would you describe the golf club?*' A small number of volunteers answered by referring to the golf course and the clubhouse. A minority of volunteers also referred to cultural practices, including whether the club was formal or relaxed, whether they had dress codes, or how they were welcoming to outsiders. However, club infrastructure and culture were not the most commonly cited aspects of the golf club. More often than not, when asked to describe their golf club, volunteers talked about their fellow members. They spoke about friendship and the sociability of their fellow members. 20 out of the 28 interviewees directly mentioned the club's members when describing their golf club.

Some interviews described the golf club in both structural and social terms. For example, at Club A which had an impressive golf course, volunteers sometimes mentioned both the course and the members:

> *Well, there's the course which I enjoy. I also enjoy the personalities of the membership here as well. [A1]*

> *From a golf perspective you probably have to take the golf course, but then there's also the social side. [A3]*

However, above all else, volunteers tended to perceive their golf club as a group of members. For example, at Club D, there was a strong emphasis on the club as a group of sociable members. For example, when asked to describe the golf club, volunteers said:

> *Since I've joined, I can't believe what a fantastic place it is for the social aspect of it, for the golf obviously, and it is friendly. [D1]*

> *I think it's a very friendly golf club. We have a pretty good social life here. [D2]*

At Club B, when asked to describe the golf club, one interviewee talked about the importance of her friends. Her understanding of 'the club' even extended to contact among her social group outside of the physical confines of the golf club:

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> *In my view of it, my perspective of it, it's a friendly place. I like very much especially the ladies section, we do a lot apart from the golf. We go to shows, we go on holiday, we go away for weekends. We even go walking if the weather is, sometimes for a change, a few of us. It's very much social and golfing, for me anyhow. A lot of friends here, I would say all my friends, apart from family are connected to the golf club. [B2]*

Volunteers' descriptions of their club tended to be people-centric. The club was indistinguishable from its members. It was towards this social notion of 'the club' that interviewees invariably expressed a sense of belonging. For example, one lady captain articulated how her sense of belonging went beyond the physical and structural aspects of the golf club and was grounded in the wider membership:

> *I think I've said the same thing over and over again, but I can't emphasise enough that from a pride point of view, for a passion about the club, meaning the club and the people and the group and the whole community, it's not just about 18 holes and hitting a little ball around. [A2]*

Similarly, when asked what being a member of the golf club meant, a chairman referred to the people around him:

> *I'm part of an association, I'm part of a group, I'm part of a team. [A1]*

The sense of being part of a group was similarly observed by the researcher at an open competition run by club volunteers at Club A. The organisation of the event was a team effort and volunteers enjoyed interacting with fellow members. For example, there was one member who took great satisfaction from being part of a volunteer group:

> *I had a conversation with one of the older volunteers. I had already observed him enjoying interactions with the other volunteers, invariably done with much laughter. He said he used to be in the army and that he was familiar with working*

as part of a team. He said he liked being part of a team and enjoyed the camaraderie. I noticed how often he used the term team to refer to his fellow volunteers. [Researcher observation notes at Club A]

Volunteers had positive feelings towards other members and appreciated their qualities. These qualities typically included other members' friendliness, sociability and commitment to golf. The characteristics of fellow members were special. Such feelings towards other club members are exemplified by a series of quotes from a club treasurer at a small golf club in an area populated by multiple clubs. His club was far from being the most prestigious in the local area. Nevertheless, he was passionate about the commitment to golf and the sociability of his fellow members:

> *One day, it might be nice to go, 'Okay, I'll move to a top club' but for the money, is it worth it?" It's a better craic with the lads here. We have an absolute laugh.*

> *I don't think even if I had enough money to go and choose what club to go and play at in [the local area], I wouldn't leave. That's how good it is. I could go and play golf at [a local prestigious course] with my dad and all his mates who are there -- not the same. All my mates are here. All my golf mates are here.*

> *I think in a lot of golf clubs less than a third of people actually play more than their three rounds a year to actually get their handicap certificate, but here you'd have a much higher participation in competitions. Everybody here wants to play golf. They really want to play it.*

> *It's a great group of lads. Everybody wants to help each other out. If you're having a bad round, someone will come to you on the golf course and go, "You're over swinging it or you're doing this or you're doing that." They want to help you get better. They're not going to be like at the top clubs where you knob your ball over to the right and they all walk off to the left because you're playing well and they want to beat you. It's completely different here. Everybody wants to support each other. It may just be that we're really, really lucky. Maybe it's*

because we've tried to get everybody who comes here to be part of something and maybe that's why that's the case.

One of the lads could put something on here [referring to his smart phone] going, "I'm going out for my birthday. Any of you want to come?" 90% of the lads would turn up. If you did that at a top club, you'd probably get 5% turn up. [E4]

Similarly, a long-standing volunteer reflected on how friendships within her golf club made belonging meaningful:

I think as soon as you get friendship in a club it means lots. It's not coming just to golf, it's coming for friends, and we sit and have a coffee and a drink afterwards and it's all part of the deal.

The other golf clubs always say they envy our friendship. We're a small golf club, but they always say, and we think so ourselves, that our friendship within the club, rooting for each other, and things like that is second to none. [B2]

The sense of belonging was touchingly expressed by a volunteer who, at the age of 79, was suffering various health issues and had recently been struggling to play golf. When managing to get back out on the golf course, he felt the warmth of being among fellow golfers once again:

The nicest thing is, because I've had lots of health issues and I haven't played golf much recently, whenever I have played, it's amazing how many people come across and say 'I thought you'd died' [Laughter]. 'How nice to see you again'. It's just people. [D4]

While belonging to a golf club tended to mean being among other members, an important caveat is required here. Volunteers didn't necessarily have positive feelings towards all their fellow members. In clubs with several hundred members, it wasn't possible to know everyone. Furthermore, some volunteers talked about the frustrations and disagreements they had with some sections of the club membership. Chapter 6 on volunteer-member discussions explored

some of these disagreements. Notwithstanding this, volunteers talked about how they were, at the very least, strongly attached to a group of members within their club. It was a feeling of being part of a group of members that mostly characterised interviewees' sense of belonging.

7.2.2 Feeling of involvement

Analysis of interview transcripts revealed how volunteers felt involved in their golf clubs. As shall be described below, volunteers felt involved because they had contributed to the club. Self-reflection and an evaluation of their contributions made this feeling possible. By reflecting on their contributions, they felt a sense of involvement that psychologically bound them to their club.

Volunteers' feelings of involvement were based on the understanding that they had contributed. For example, a board member describes how volunteering had heightened her sense of involvement:

> *I made the effort to get involved, so I get to see the benefits of direct involvement. So yes, I feel proud of it. Before, I probably felt ambivalent. It's great, a nice place to play golf, the people are friendly. I loved it, it was good, it was easy, it was relatively cheap compared to other clubs - all of those things. But there wasn't the level of emotion about it. It was just playing golf, whatever. Whereas now, I think there's a heightened sense of belonging to something and having an active steer in that. It's something that I enjoy. It's not just passive, it's actually, "oh, I could do that well." [C5]*

A seniors captain reflected on how he felt a part of the club because of his contribution:

> *I guess I'm proud of myself in as much as I'm not just resting on my laurels and letting other people organise it for me. So I'm proud of the fact that I'm trying to put myself forward to help and do something. I'm also proud of the golf club because I feel a part of it. [A3]*

A board member reflected on how his involvement had inspired a greater affinity with the club's progress:

> *It just gives me some satisfaction to see people praising the work that goes on out there, whereas in the past, it's been, it's a golf course, you come and play golf. They may have done the same in the past but, perhaps, I see it more now. I feel more involved now. [C2]*

Volunteers' feelings of involvement were not necessarily restricted to their personal contribution. The feeling of involvement could also develop from the contributions of a group of which they were a member. This was possible because of volunteers' sense of belonging. Being part of a group within the club meant that some volunteers could feel involvement through the contributions of their group. For example, a board member described how he was proud of the way a small group of like-minded volunteers, of which he was a part, had worked on the club's marketing strategy:

> *I've taken a bit more pride in the place to be fair because there are tangible things that we've done that I know either I've been responsible for that or secondly, as a group of four or five, we've been responsible for that. So, I'll give you an example: membership at our place went from 550 to just under 800 in six years. [E5]*

Similarly, an interviewee described the involvement she felt because of her family's long-standing contribution to the golf club:

> *I've been a member for so long. My mum and dad were. My dad was president when it was the centenary year, so that was a great honour for him. When dad died, my mum wanted to give something to the club. She paid to have all that unit put in there, all the display unit. There is a plaque at the bottom in memory of my dad. Things like that. I think it's because I'm proud of it, because of my history with the club. [B2]*

Volunteers didn't necessarily have to make large contributions to feel involvement. Modest contributions also established connections to the club and generated feelings of involvement. For example, a ladies captain describes how performing basic course maintenance tasks increased her bond with the club:

> *[Volunteering] reinforces the sense of belonging, loyalty, wanting it to be successful. As I say, I hadn't done a working party before, but I went to one last Monday. There was a palpable, good spirit about it. It was mainly retired people, not exclusively. It was physically quite hard. [The ground staff] had hollowed and tied and so we pushed the cores off and loaded them into a trailer. We did all 18 in about five hours, I think. It's normally three or four days worth of work for the ground staff. The ground staff were there as well assisting. That definitely strengthened our bond with the club. [C4]*

For some interviewees, even the act of supporting events and functions at the golf club could be regarded as contributions. These acts weren't considered to be volunteering, but they did represent a wider notion of participation. For example, an interviewee described how small contributions such as supporting club functions had meaning:

> *In whatever way, I come and support things. I'm spending over the bar. I'm buying tickets. If we have ladies things or there's a raffle or anything, 9 times out of 10, if I know that's what's happening I'll bring a bottle up or something for the raffle. I try and give back as much as I can. [B2]*

Success takes various forms within golf clubs and volunteers were conscious of how they had contributed to a variety of accomplishments. Achievements included improvements in organisational performance, physical improvements to the course and clubhouse, and competitive golfing successes against other clubs. The feeling of pride in contributing to improved organisational performance was particularly acute among volunteers in governance and management roles, such as the chairman, board members and club captain. For

example, a board director describes how his feeling of involvement was enhanced by his contribution to club success:

> *The satisfaction for me comes from seeing that the membership is slowly building up, especially now that we've taken over as directors. The club's getting a better reputation, people that have left are coming back and that sort of thing. That makes the club more successful. Therefore, I feel I've been a part of making the club more successful. [C1]*

Similarly, a vice-captain described how his increased involvement in the club's management meant that he was more psychologically invested in its success:

> *I think the more you see how a club runs and how much work people are putting in behind the scenes, and the more you've got a history of doing that yourself, you're vested in it being a success and continuing to be a success. Certainly, as vice-captain and soon to be captain, on your watch, you want for nothing to go wrong and for it to be successful. We're all actively promoting the club. I think inevitably if you're on a committee, and now, involved with the board indirectly or as an observer, I can see the importance of the club having a good name and membership hopefully creeping upwards. [C4]*

Volunteers that directly contributed to the golf course and clubhouse improvements felt more involved with the clubs' physical space. For example, a volunteer that did course maintenance works made the connection between his own work and improved course conditions:

> *I would say it's quite rewarding. I mean the course, it's old. There's a lot of problems with the drainage because a lot of the old clay pipes were blocked. There was one or two where we did some investigation. We dug down and got them up. We exposed the problem and cleaned the pipe, got it running and then we left it for the greenkeepers to come back and fill it in and re-turf. You can see that has brought some benefits where we did it. On the 16th, 5th, 1st. [B3]*

Similarly, an interviewee described how a group of ladies volunteered to improve some of the club's garden areas, which generated pride in the course:

> *[The front garden] was all overgrown. It was a mess, it was untidy. I said, "Can we get this tree cut down?" "Yes." So, we cut the tree down. The next thing the ladies said, "Oh, we'll do that." There were a dozen ladies here on Wednesday. They got involved with it. There's an area down by the third hole and they decided they wanted a memorial garden rather than memorial boards and benches. They decided to have this little bit of garden. That's got a bit overgrown now so they want to go down there and get stuck into that. It gives them a bit of pride in it. [C2]*

It was also possible to feel involved in the club's sporting achievement. Such feelings were strong among volunteers that organised and supported competitive golf. This sense of involvement was most evident among junior organisers who helped junior members achieve golfing success. For example, a junior organiser described his pride in seeing junior members win competitions and achieve success at a higher level:

> *It's great seeing the teams win things. Like, we've had a really successful year or a few years, with the teams winning some really good match play events in [the county]. And also when they go on to represent the county. And when a couple of them have made it into the men's team, the county men's team. That kind of thing is really satisfying, to see them really progressing. Yeah, just the standard that they all kind of get to, we may not have the biggest section, but the ones that we do have are really very good. We're really proud of all the successes they're having really. That's what it's about from our point of view, within my role. [A5]*

Similarly, another junior organiser summed up his pride in helping his juniors succeed:

> *I get a certain amount of satisfaction seeing [the juniors develop] and that's what-- that's the main reason for doing it*

if I'm honest. I'm beginning now to see the juniors achieve a certain level of success. [C6]

Across all the semi-structured interviews, volunteers felt that they had made positive contributions. Volunteers had evaluated their efforts and, even under challenging circumstances, took pleasure from them. In the more successful clubs, the sense of pleasure from being involved in success was palpable. This was particularly evident at Club C, which had made substantial progress over the past two years. It was also generally evident at Clubs A and D, which were performing well. Furthermore, despite a challenging operating environment at Club B, there was also evidence of volunteers taking pride in their contributions. Regardless of the circumstances, there always seemed to be a way for volunteers to conceive of their contributions positively.

When reflecting on their contributions and accomplishments, it helped if volunteers received recognition from within the club. Volunteers liked to see a connection between their contributions and members' enjoyment of the club. When members expressed positive opinions, this affirmed volunteers' feeling of involvement. For example, a club captain described his pride at receiving positive recognition from what he perceived to be '*hard to please*' members:

> *It's pleasing when you get some of the older guys now, when you're having a chat with them about things, they acknowledge the fact that a lot of the stuff that's been done is either down to what I've done personally or what the group of three or four of us have done. They can see the difference. [E5]*

Similarly, a junior organiser describes the recognition he received from other members and how this stimulated a feeling of involvement:

> *[As a result of volunteering], you probably feel more of an affinity to the place. It's nice when a lot of members have obviously seen what I've done and have been grateful. It's nice to get positive feedback from the members. They enjoy seeing young kids there. [E7]*

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Recognition was generally not expected nor actively sought by volunteers. Many of the volunteers were even resistant to grandiose forms of recognition, such as receiving awards or special honours. They were not volunteering because they wanted accolades. Nevertheless, they were grateful when members simply thanked them or acknowledged their efforts. For example, a junior organiser described his appreciation for some basic recognition:

> *We all like to do a good job and be recognised for it, so it's nice to get feedback. I don't expect to have recognition in the sense that I don't want to have awards or anything like that, but it's just nice to have feedback saying 'do you know what, you're doing a really good job' or 'the juniors are fantastic'. [C6]*

Thus, when volunteers received recognition for their contributions, it helped to entrench their feeling of involvement with the club.

7.2.3 Pride in the club

Analysis of interview transcripts and observation notes showed that volunteers were proud of their golf club. As shall be described below, volunteers wanted others to hold favourable opinions about their club. Volunteer's sense of pride was, therefore, an emotion grounded in a concern for what other people thought about their golf club. In this way, it was different from the feeling of belonging and involvement, which could be formed intrinsically through volunteers assigning meaning to their own relationships and their own contributions. Pride in the club, however, was based on volunteers' perception of what outsiders thought. These outsiders included visitors to the golf club, golfers from other clubs and governing bodies within golf. Volunteers felt proud of their club when they received validation from these external sources.

Volunteers' pride in the reputation of their golf club was identified early in the process of collecting and analysing data. Shortly after starting data collection,

the researcher volunteered to help at an open competition hosted by Club A. The event was run by club members volunteering for the day. It was evident that they all took great pride in their golf club. They took pleasure in other golfers visiting their club and enjoying the golf course. One of the section captains was particularly keen that everyone visiting should form a positive opinion about the club. His concern extended to what this study's researcher thought about the club, as shown by the following observation notes:

> *A3 came over to me at lunch and said he would be happy to take me out on a golf buggy so that I could see the course. I think it was a quiet part of the day for him and he had some time to spare. So, after we had finished lunch, we took the buggy out. A3 was keen to show me the course. He enjoyed talking about each hole - the challenges they presented, where you wanted hit the ball off the tee, what dangers lurked on each hole. We didn't have time to go around all 18 holes but we covered most of them. His enthusiasm was infectious. He had real pride in the golf course. When we passed some of the tournament golfers, he asked if they were enjoying themselves. Each time they said that the course was wonderful and they were having a great time, a smile would beam across his face. [Researcher observation notes]*

During his interview, A3 spoke about his pride in the club. It had grown out of a sense of belonging and feeling of involvement in the club. He was keen for others to view the club positively:

> *I'm proud of the golf club because since I have been at this golf club, in particular, I feel a part of it, if you see what I mean. And that makes it easy to volunteer and therefore it becomes very important to me that when you come here, for example, that you go away thinking that this is a nice place and a good club. In a small way, I feel it's my role now to try and make sure that everybody is having a good time. [A3]*

Golf clubs typically receive plenty of visitors. Visiting golfers, who pay green fees to play the course, are common. Most volunteers said that they wanted these visitors to enjoy their golf club. There were sound business reasons for this

because visitors increased non-membership income. However, there also seemed to be an emotional aspect to volunteers wanting visitors to enjoy their golf club. Volunteers spoke about how visitors commented on various aspects of their club, including the course, the clubhouse and its members. They felt satisfaction when visitors perceived their golf club positively. Volunteers took pride in hearing positive feedback. For example, a ladies captain described her pride in hearing visitors make complimentary comments about her club's course:

> *When I talk to visitors from other clubs and they say 'god it's*
> *magnificent out there', I love the fact that I'm involved with*
> *the club, because you almost take it as a personal compliment.*
> *See how conceited I am [laughter]. So I'm very proud. [A2]*

Volunteers also took pride in their clubhouse and derived satisfaction from seeing visitors enjoying it. For example, a volunteer who did a lot of internal decoration works describes how she enjoyed seeing visitors appreciate the clubhouse:

> *I just like to see things nice and when you get people coming*
> *from away, it's nice that they can come in the club and like it.*
> *We did these curtains, me and [another volunteer]. We made*
> *all these and varnished the floor. [B1]*

Volunteers could also take pride in how others viewed the behaviour of their club's members. This pride was especially evident when members were participating in competitions. For example, a junior organiser describes his pride in the way his juniors represented the club:

> *The juniors played in a local three-club competition, a couple*
> *of weeks ago at [a neighbouring club], and the junior*
> *organisers from [the neighbouring club] came up to us*
> *afterwards and said how impressed she was with our*
> *youngsters. She knew that we'd been struggling for a team all*
> *year. Two of the youngsters had only just got a handicap*
> *playing in a scratch competition on a different course. She just*
> *came and said how, and it was good to hear somebody else*

*say, how brave the kids were, how well-behaved they were,
what a credit to the club they were. OK, I'm not responsible for
their behaviour or anything like that, but there's a sense that it
was something I'd had a role and a part to play in, and
somebody else from another club had recognised that it was
an achievement for our youngsters and the club, in particular,
to get a team to go and compete at that level in those
circumstances. OK, I know it's not down to me, but if
something positive is happening and I'm involved with it -- it's
not because of my involvement, in fact it's coincidental -- you
can't help but feel, get a little bit satisfaction out of that, can
you? [D2]*

Since volunteers felt a sense of belonging to other members, they could feel
pride in being associated with them. For example, one ladies captain describes
her pride in the attitude of fellow members of the ladies section:

*We have a reputation for being posh and stuffy because we
are one of the oldest clubs [in the area]. But actually, we're
not. We had a good example last weekend. Two of our ladies
went and played in a ladies open [at another golf club]. And
because it was the royal wedding they turned up in dresses,
hats and played 18 holes of golf dressed in wedding
attire. And they won actually [laughter]. [The club manager]
is going to put it in the newsletter. And we said that will go out
and show that we are not the 'everything has to be perfect'
club. That's the type of club we are. I'm very proud to be
associated with that type and group of people. [A2]*

Similarly, since volunteers felt a sense of involvement, they could feel pride in
the club's achievements. The overall sense of pride that volunteers felt when
they contributed to a club's accomplishments was nicely summed up by a ladies
captain. She described how, through volunteering, she felt a part of the club
and took pride in its successes:

*Last week we had a triangular friendly match with ladies from
[two local courses]. It worked well. It was just a friendly….. I
had to stand up and do the speech at the end and say, "I hope
you liked it" and I thought, yes, I am proud of this club. I do like
it here and I am chuffed to invite other people to come and see*

> *it because I think it's great. And I think we're doing a good job*
> *and I'm chuffed to be part of this. That's how I feel. In looking*
> *at it and talking about it -- I can't imagine changing my club. I*
> *can't imagine leaving here unless I left the county or*
> *something. It would be something like that. I can't imagine*
> *doing that here. I am proud of the club. I'm chuffed with*
> *what's been achieved. The way that we present ourselves and*
> *make other people welcome. [C7]*

This quote is indicative of how many interviewees reflected on their experience as a volunteer. It shows how volunteers assessed what they had contributed and what they had achieved. It illustrates how volunteers develop a strong pride in their golf club as a result of their individual contributions.

Volunteers had a keen sense of the attributes that set their golf club apart from other clubs. As such, volunteers' sense of pride in their golf club was often expressed by making comparisons to other local golf clubs. During interviews, volunteers readily described the superior aspects of their golf clubs. Topics for comparison typically covered: the quality of the course; the clubhouse; the quality of club management; and, the friendliness of the members. Pride wasn't necessarily dependent on club status. It was present among volunteers at all clubs involved in this study. Whatever the golf club, there always seemed to be some aspect that set it apart and was worthy of pride. Furthermore, pride was present across all types of volunteer and was not subject to age, gender or other personal characteristic.

Pride in the club's reputation was especially evident in Club C. The golf course had previously been owned and managed by a local businessman but had recently been taken over by the members. It was now an associational club, and so members had a stake in it. Volunteers were making a significant contribution to the club. It now mattered more to volunteers what others thought of the club. For example, the chairman spoke about how the club's reputation among the wider golfing fraternity was important to him:

We get a lot more recognition now from within the county in the different things that we do. There's a past captains society, we go to functions with them, and we're getting noticed as being a progressive club and moving things forward. That's what I like to see.

It's very important how others perceive us. I think it is very important to us. You want people to be jealous of what we've got. We've always felt, perhaps in the past, that the more prestigious clubs look down on us. They looked down on us as a proprietor owned club. There is a difference between a proprietor's club and a members' club, and they look down on the proprietor's club - most other clubs do. Now we've become a members' club, it gives us a bit more respect from other clubs. Other clubs are now looking at us as a possible threat to them because we are progressive.

I just don't want them to think we're the poor relation. We're on equal standing as far as I'm concerned. We've got a much better aspect to this place. Financially we're not as sound as them and not as good facilities as they've got. But this is a much better club and clubhouse….yeah, just a much better run club, I feel, than what they've got. [C2]

Perceptions of club prestige sometimes featured as a source of pride for many volunteers. This was especially evident in Club A, which operated at the top end of the golfing market. Its volunteers took pride in how the club compared favourably to others. The ladies captain described how the club's course compared to other courses:

The standard of our course is very high compared with other clubs. I mean, we all moan about it at various times, but you've only got to go to other courses to realise what a high standard is maintained at this club. [A4]

Volunteers were especially proud to receive positive comment from people and organisations that they considered to be knowledgeable and influential. This included positive feedback from representatives from other local golf clubs and golf's governing bodies. A good reputation among knowledgeable outsiders conferred prestige on the club. For example, a board member from Club A

described her pride in how England Golf had recognised the quality of the club's course:

> *We're putting the golf club on the radar with England Golf for big competitions. It was great because we had the English amateur ladies championship here are a few years ago. It puts [the golf club] out there. [A2]*

A female volunteer at another quality course described a sense of pride in the course being used for significant competitions:

> *We've got a really good reputation for the course. We're holding [a national amateur tournament] the year after next. We've had quite a few England Golf county competitions here too. [E2]*

As with many of the quotes used throughout this findings section, it is noticeable once again how the volunteer associated herself with course by the use of '*we*'. Like many others interviewed in this research, this volunteer could draw on her sense of belonging and feeling of involvement to take pride in her club.

7.3   Summary of findings

In summary, affective club commitment is grounded in social relationships and a sense of belonging to a group of members. Affective club commitment is also characterised by a feeling of involvement that emerges from contributing to the club. In other words, it was people and participation that formed the basis for volunteers' psychological attachment. The feelings of belonging and involvement could then transcend into a feeling of pride in the whole club, which was commonly expressed as a concern for the club's external reputation.

Figure 11 below illustrates how affective club commitment is grounded in social relationships, develops through involvement and transcends to a feeling of

pride in the club. The presentation of the components of affective club commitment in the form of a pyramid is intended to show how commitment is grounded in social relationships and built through contribution. The diagrammatic visualisation establishes affective club commitment as a layered concept.

Figure 11 – The concept of affective club commitment

Pride in the club
- Concern for club's external reputation.
- Make favorable comparisons to other clubs.

Feeling of involvement
- Contribute to the club.
- Feel a part of the club.
- Take pride in personal (and group) contributions.

Sense of belonging
- Feel connected to a group of members.
- Value friendships within the club.
- Perceive the club as an assembly of members.
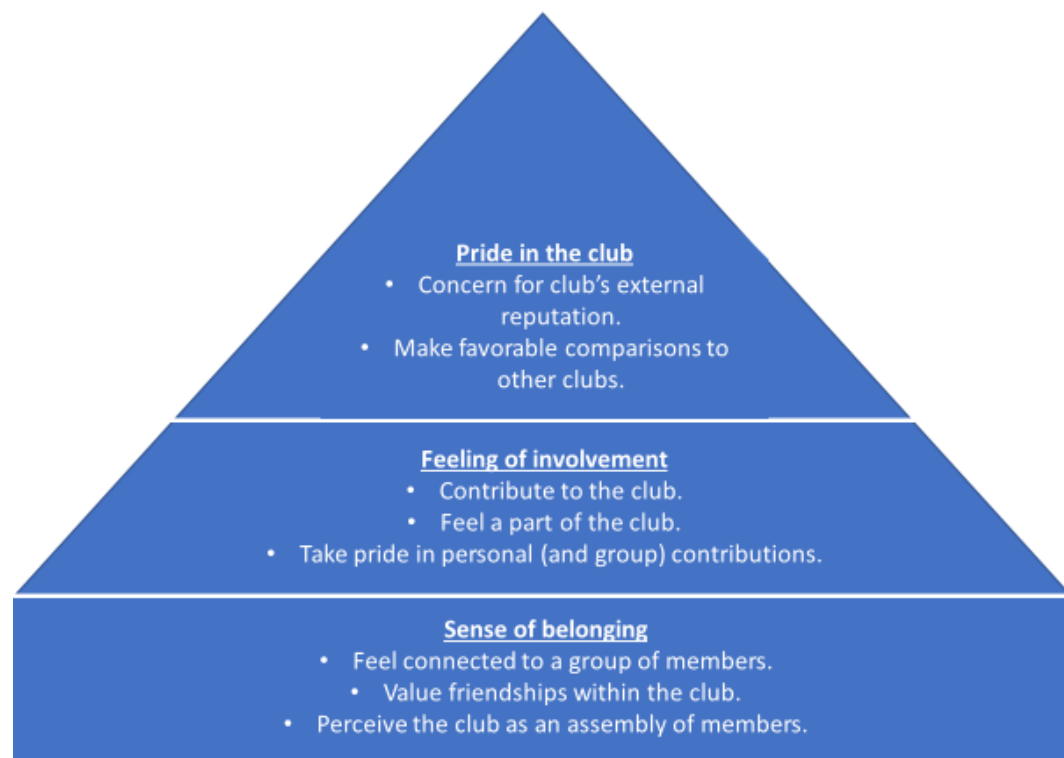
When interpreting this model, it is important to remember that the analysis is based on the researcher's interpretation of the data and construction of a theoretical concept. Nevertheless, it is hoped that the evidence presented above provides a convincing basis for the analysis.

8   Discussion

8.1   Introduction

In this chapter, the study's research findings are discussed with a view to answering the research question. As stated in section 1.4 of the introductory chapter, the aim of this study was to explore how volunteers' experiences within voluntary sports clubs shape their commitment to the organisation. In addressing this research aim, the findings cover three major themes, namely how members became volunteers, the experience of volunteers and the nature of volunteers' organisational commitment. This three-part structure is maintained in this discussion section, as each theme is considered in turn in sections 8.2, 8.3 and 8.4.

Each section follows a similar pattern. The sections begin with a summary of findings. They then move on to consider how the concepts constructed in this thesis fit with theory in the existing theoretical literature. The discussion considers how this study's concepts contradict, confirm or extend existing theory. Consideration is also given to how extant theory can support and strengthen this study's findings. Each section then considers the implications of this thesis for the literature on the substantive topic of sports club volunteering. In considering extant literature - both theoretical and substantive - the discussion revisits literature included in the literature review in chapter 2, but also integrates other theory from literature where it has a bearing on the grounded theory developed in this study. Finally, at the end of each discussion section, there is an assessment of the practical implications of this study's research findings for golf club management, golf's governing bodies and sports policy-makers.

As well as looking at each theme separately, this discussion chapter also seeks to integrate the study findings into a cohesive narrative about volunteering in golf clubs. As such, in section 8.5, this chapter considers how the three concepts

of club socialisation, volunteer-member discussions and affective club commitment relate to one another. Furthermore, in section 8.5, this discussion chapter returns to the volunteer process model, which was introduced as a theoretical framework earlier in section 2.4. There is a discussion of how this study's findings relate to the volunteer process, including the presentation of a volunteer process model tailored to voluntary sports clubs.

This discussion chapter ends with a summary of the key points. This summary provides the foundations from which conclusions can be drawn in chapter 9, where the research question is answered.

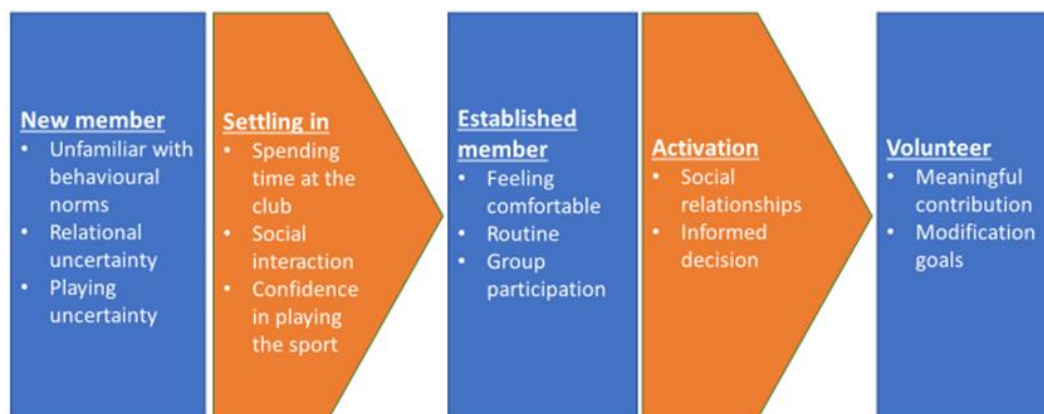## 8.2 Club socialisation and volunteering

8.2.1 Summary of findings

In the first theme of this study, the focus was on antecedents to volunteering and how golf club members become volunteers. In this section, after a brief summary of the findings, the implications for organisational socialisation theory, sports club volunteering theory and the management of member socialisation and volunteer recruitment are discussed.

The findings from this study suggest that associational golf club members pass through a socialisation process on their way to becoming a volunteer. The process involves stages and transitions that affect whether and how members become volunteers. At the *new member stage*, golfers feel uncertain about club behavioural norms, social relationships and playing golf. New member uncertainty tends to be reduced by prior golfing experience and having relationships with existing members. The transition from newcomer to established member involves *settling in*, which is facilitated by newcomers spending time at the club, forming relations with other members and developing confidence in playing the sport. At the *established member* stage, golfers feel comfortable at the golf club, with routines and group relationships

anchoring participation. The transition from established member to volunteer is *activated* through social relationships and an understanding of the club, which fosters informed decisions about volunteering. The socialisation process gives meaning to volunteering although, having become comfortable with the club's ways of doing things, volunteers are less inclined to pursue significant changes to the way the club is run. Figure 12 below summarises these findings in diagrammatic form.

Figure 12 – Theoretical model of the club socialisation of volunteers in voluntary sports clubs

8.2.2 Implications for organisational socialisation theory

The proposed model for the club socialisation of volunteers in voluntary sports clubs has similarities with other organisational socialisation models. There are, however, some significant differences. This section explores these similarities and differences and considers the implications for organisational socialisation theory.

Like other studies investigating the organisational socialisation of volunteers, this research confirmed high levels of uncertainty for organisational newcomers (Lois, 1999; Haski-Leventhal and Bargal, 2008; Kramer, 2011). This study also supports the notion that there are different types of uncertainty (Kramer, 2010; Jablin, 2011). Interviewees in this research talked about behavioural, relational

and playing uncertainty, whereas Kramer's model includes organisational, social and task uncertainty (Kramer, 2010, 2011). Uncertainties around organisational behavioural norms and the organisational are similar, as are relational and social uncertainties. There is an interesting difference, however, between the type of task uncertainty. This difference arises because golf club volunteers join the organisation as members and later transition to become volunteers. In many other volunteering other contexts, individuals join an organisation as a volunteer and so their initial task uncertainty relates to what they are expected to do in their role as a volunteer. For golf club newcomers, the primary task uncertainty is playing golf. Playing golf is the raison d'être of the golf club and '*lacking confidence*' and not feeling '*good enough'* as a golfer is an understandable source of anxiety for new members, especially for those that have recently taken up the sport. Overcoming this playing uncertainty, as well as organisational and social uncertainties, are thus a precursor to feeling comfortable within a club and moving on towards more active membership. This study's findings confirm that pre-existing relationships with organisational members and prior experience of the activity in other similar organisational settings tend to reduce uncertainty (Kramer, 2011). In the case of golf club newcomers, prior golfing experience and club membership, and having family, friends or work colleagues within the club, reduced initial uncertainty.

The model proposed by this research is fundamentally different from other organisational socialisation models in locating assimilation within the period of club membership before volunteering begins. In other previously studied organisational contexts, volunteers had limited knowledge of the organisation and their role when they commenced volunteering. As such, most learning about the organisation and volunteer roles occurred during role performance (McComb, 1995; Lois, 1999; Haski-Leventhal and Bargal, 2008; Kramer, 2011). However, in golf clubs, members accumulate experience and understanding of the organisation before they take on a volunteer role. All interviewees in this study had a period of membership before they became a volunteer. As one interviewee put it, it was during this prior period of membership that '*I got to*

know the club'. This accumulation of organisational knowledge before volunteering begins represents a significant difference between the socialisation of volunteers in membership-based organisations and the socialisation of volunteers in non-membership organisations.

In golf clubs, the decision to volunteer is preceded by organisational membership, which gives the member an opportunity to learn about the golf club. Most uncertainties have been resolved in the transition from new member to established member. Furthermore, when deciding whether to volunteer, established members drew on their social relationships within the club to clarify expectations and make informed decisions about whether to take on a volunteer role. Established members, therefore, face limited uncertainty when choosing to become a volunteer. As one interviewee said, '*I knew what I was letting myself in for'*. High levels of organisational knowledge are less likely for new volunteers in non-membership contexts (Lois, 1999; Haski-Leventhal and Bargal, 2008; Kramer, 2011). Instead, new volunteers in non-membership contexts are reliant on a pre-entry anticipatory socialisation stage, which involves individuals choosing an organisation and preparing for a volunteer role (Haski-Leventhal and Bargal, 2008; Kramer, 2011). Thus, the club socialisation model proposed in this thesis is fundamentally different from other volunteer socialisation models because of voluntary sports clubs' membership structure.

Similarities and differences between organisational socialisation models occur in the number and type of post-newcomer stages. Organisational socialisation models for volunteers have tended to include several post-newcomer stages to reflect increasing levels of understanding and involvement. Lois (1999) suggests a process of three stages, including the new volunteer, peripheral volunteer and core volunteer. Similarly, Haski-Leventhal and Bargal (2008) suggest that after the new volunteer stage, there is an emotional involvement stage, which leads on to an established volunteer stage. However, in this study's club socialisation model, there is just the one volunteer stage, which is preceded by an established member stage. One explanation for this difference is that the club's

established member stage provides a similar function to the peripheral volunteer stage, whereby the individual develops a deeper organisational understanding. That said, other scholars have suggested that core and peripheral volunteers are distinguishable within voluntary sports clubs (Nichols, 2005; Ringuet-Riot et al., 2014). This begs the question of why this study did not develop two volunteer stages. In this regard, it was apparent from talking to golf club volunteers that they rarely perceived a distinction between core and peripheral volunteering. It was also notable how some interviewees had gone straight into substantial volunteer roles, such as club captaincy or board members. Their first experience of volunteering was in a major role and, in the main, they coped well with this. This would suggest that there is not necessarily progression across multiple volunteer stages within the golf club and that the established member stage acts as an adequate platform for building knowledge and understanding of the organisation. Taking the similarities and differences into account, it is possible to make the broad point that, regardless of context, volunteers experience different levels of organisational understanding and involvement as they pass through different stages of the organisational socialisation process.

One final point is worth noting in relation to organisational socialisation theory. While the stages and transitions proposed in the model in Figure 12 follow a broadly linear process, this should not be interpreted as rigid linearity. Some interviewees described how they faced setbacks during their integration into the club. Some interviewees also spoke about how they never felt comfortable at other clubs and so left them, thereby dropping out of the process. While it was not the focus of this study, it is clear that many golfers drop out of the process. Furthermore, the boundaries between each stage were often blurred with aspects of socialisation occurring at different speeds. Interviewees often talked about how they overcame behavioural, social and playing uncertainties at varying rates. For example, proficient golfers quickly felt comfortable on the golf course but, if they didn't know anyone in the club, they took comparatively longer to develop strong social relationships. These findings are consistent with

other literature on organisational socialisation which argues that the stages and transitions of organisational socialisation should not be understood as a rigidly linear process (Kramer, 2010; Jablin, 2011). It is, therefore, important to recognise that organisational socialisation models such as that presented in Figure 12 represent a simplified overview of a process.

8.2.3 Implications for sports club volunteering theory

This study's findings illustrate how club membership is an important antecedent to sports club volunteering. The proposed club socialisation model builds on previous research that found sports participation and club membership correlate with sports club volunteering (Burgham and Downward, 2005; Cuskelly and O'Brien, 2013; Hallmann, 2015). As shall be discussed below, this study plausibly accounts for the relationship between membership and volunteering by articulating the social process by which golfers and golf club members become golf club volunteers.

The findings from this study suggest three types of club members: newcomer, established member and volunteer. As noted above in section 8.2.2, there may be a case for extending this categorisation by splitting the volunteer category into two, thereby creating four types: newcomer, established member, peripheral volunteer and core volunteer. To this author's knowledge, there isn't yet a typology of sports club members that accounts for different levels of involvement among members. While it is perhaps too presumptuous to claim a new typology of sports club members here, especially given this study's focus on volunteers, the research findings do highlight how members have varying degrees of involvement in their club. Moreover, extending a typology across membership and volunteering arguably helps to link rather than separate membership and volunteering. This is useful given that most sports clubs' volunteers come from among the membership (Burgham and Downward, 2005; Cuskelly and O'Brien, 2013; Hallmann, 2015). A typology of members creates an integrated means of distinguishing different levels of participation and

engagement in the club, which may help voluntary sports clubs to reflect on how member experiences feed through into volunteering.

The club socialisation model proposed by this study suggests that there is a strong temporal dimension to becoming a volunteer in a voluntary sports club. Schlesinger et al. (2013) have already suggested that the length of club membership influences whether members become volunteers. This study's findings are consistent with this in proposing a social process that takes time to evolve. The club socialisation model sets out several stages and transitions that a member goes through before becoming a volunteer. Although the pace at which each member passes through the early stages depends on initial levels of uncertainty and opportunities to assimilate, the process requires at least a modicum of time, even for the most experienced golfer. Various interviewees in this study had substantial golfing biographies and were comfortable in the golf club environment, yet they still took time to '*get to know the club*' after joining. The findings from this research suggest that time spent understanding the club and building social relations plays a critical role in the activation of volunteering.

This study found that sporting participation was another important feature in the pathway to voluntary sports club volunteering. Confidence in playing golf was a significant precursor to playing regular golf and thus becoming an established member. It was from the foundation of regular and routine participation that volunteering was activated. In this regard, the proposed club socialisation model is consistent with the idea that sporting participation and volunteering both represent the systematic pursuit of a leisure activity (Stebbins, 2012) and that enthusiasm for a sport motivates sports club volunteers (Nichols et al., 2016). There are also similarities with Cuskelly's (2004) transition-extension hypothesis, which attempts to explain players' and ex-players' transition to sports club volunteering using continuity theory. In these theories, sports club volunteering is regarded as a natural extension of sporting participation.

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However, this study's findings place particular emphasis on the social aspects of membership as a stimulant to sports club volunteering. While volunteering can be considered as a continuum of sporting participation, it is significantly influenced by the social relationships that members develop within their club. Importantly, this study found that group participation fosters sports club volunteering. Just as sporting participation is strengthened by the formation of social relationships with other players and participants (Wheaton, 2000; Burke et al., 2006; Casper et al., 2007; Wood and Danylchuk, 2011), this study suggests that group participation was central to making members feel comfortable within a club and becoming an established member. Social interactions played an essential role in helping new members to settle in. The social relationships of established members also featured heavily in activating them to become a volunteer. As such, this study suggests that the formation of group relations plays a critically important role throughout the entire process by which members become volunteers. Indeed, it is a central argument of this research that the *social experiences* of membership forge and shape members' volunteering.

The role of social relations in transitioning members into volunteers offers some insights into why demographic and socio-economic factors often correlate with rates of volunteering. Research has found that people with particular demographic and socio-economic characteristics are more likely to volunteer in voluntary sports clubs (Burgham and Downward, 2005; Taylor et al., 2012; Schlesinger and Nagel, 2013; Hallmann, 2015). The evidence from this research suggests that the club socialisation process favours those that can readily assimilate. Newcomers that had prior experience in similar club environments or already know someone in the golf club found it easier to settle in. It helped when new golfers already '*knew a few of the lads*'. Demographic and socio-economic similarities among golfers also appeared conducive to the development of new social relationships. As such, the club socialisation process, with its heavy reliance on social relationships, is effective at assimilating more of the same type of members.

A reliance on social relationships for socialising members, especially in clubs already lacking diversity, raises concerns about the experience of newcomers from diverse backgrounds. This study focussed on the experience of volunteers, who had successfully transitioned through the socialisation process, and so it is unsurprising that their newcomer and assimilation experiences were generally positive. They had made it through the process. Other studies focussing solely on newcomer experience have found evidence of social closure and marginalisation, especially when newcomers with diverse backgrounds joined sports clubs (McGinnis et al., 2005; Lake, 2013). Although the Lake (2013) study was of a tennis club, this sport shares with golf some of the same historical dominance by the higher socio-economic classes (Holt, 1990; Hill, 2002). While the focus and design of this study meant it wasn't well placed to discover evidence of social exclusion, the proposed model does allow for new member uncertainty that is too great to overcome. It seems likely that the club socialisation process is easier to navigate for newcomers with similar demographic and socio-economic characteristics to existing members, and harder for those without such similarities. That the club socialisation process may act as a brake on diversity should be a concern to England Golf and golf clubs that are trying to increase and diversify participation in the sport.

The findings from this study suggest that the club socialisation that takes place before volunteering has an important influence on the decision to volunteer and on the meaning that volunteers derive from their volunteering. As shall be discussed in the next three paragraphs, the club socialisation that occurs as a member has important implications for volunteers' psychological contracts, the pursuit of organisational change and the meaning they ascribe to their volunteering.

The findings from this study suggest that the club socialisation of members provides a basis for informed decisions about volunteering. Established members have already developed a good understanding of their club. They are

able to draw on their relationships with other members, including past and present volunteers, to ask questions about voluntary roles. As such, established members have realistic expectations about an impending role. Volunteers often said things like *'I knew what I was letting myself in for'* or *'I understood the commitment'.* This is indicative of a strong psychological contract (Rousseau, 1995) between the club and the volunteer. However, these findings are at odds with previous research into community rugby club volunteers, which found that discrepant expectations between club administrators and volunteers caused weak psychological contracts (Taylor et al., 2006). While that study's volunteers had previously played rugby and were familiar with the sport, it was unclear how acquainted they were with the rugby clubs at which they were volunteering. The rugby study also didn't consider the social relationships of volunteers. A greater reliance on transactional administrative systems rather than social relationships may have caused some breaches of psychological contracts. Further research on how psychological contracts are affected by prior member socialisation may help to evaluate this study's suggestion that member socialisation supports informed decisions about volunteering and creates robust psychological contracts.

The club socialisation process tends to generate volunteers that fit in with club's members, cultural practices and normative behaviours. This is consistent with organisational socialisation theory, which is concerned with explaining how organisations change individuals to fit in with their requirements. However, socialisation theory is also attentive to how individuals attempt to change organisations to suit their own needs (Kramer, 2010; Jablin, 2011). While newcomers rarely try to change the organisation to suit their needs, individualisation becomes a more realistic goal once established in the organisation (Jablin, 2011). In this regard, this study's findings show that some volunteers develop change goals as a result of their experiences as club members. Change goals were more apparent among volunteers that had shorter golfing biographies, faced greater uncertainties as a new member and had some problematic experiences during assimilation. One volunteer summed

this up when she said, '*I didn't want others to go through the same thing as I did*'. However, the extent of changes sought by volunteers invariably remained limited. The changes sought represented gentle shifts in normative practices rather than wholesale or radical change. For example, one club captain felt that taking off his captain's jacket during a formal dinner represented change, yet he generally remained enthusiastic about the tradition and symbolism of awarding jackets to club captains. In becoming an established member, individuals had become accustomed to the golf club's ways of doing things. They had generally established a good fit between their own interests and what the golf club offers. If golfers are unable to fit in at the newcomer stage, they are likely to leave. Thus, the club socialisation process tends to generate volunteers that wish to reproduce the cultural practices and behavioural norms that have become meaningful to them.

Above all else, this study's finding suggests that club socialisation as members tends to result in meaningful volunteering. Feelings towards their club had formed well before they started volunteering. Among golf club volunteers there was the belief that they were making a meaningful contribution and '*giving back*'. They often spoke about how they were volunteering because it was '*our club*'. Other studies have similarly shown that volunteers in sports clubs regard their contributions as meaningful (Misener et al., 2010; Cuskelly and O'Brien, 2013; Darcy et al., 2014). There are also similarities to other volunteering contexts, where established community membership acts as a stimulus to a deep and meaningful volunteering experience (O'Toole and Grey, 2016). In community settings rich with normative behaviour and social relationships, explanations of volunteering are not readily reduced to the psychological motivations of individuals. Rather, volunteering has deeper sociological roots that imbue voluntary action with a sense of meaning that extends beyond the self.

8.2.4   Implications for member socialisation and volunteer recruitment

The findings on the club socialisation of volunteers have implications for voluntary clubs and sports governing bodies, especially golfs clubs and England Golf. The club socialisation process affects member retention and the pool of potential volunteers within a club. Yet, as is apparent in the case of associational golf clubs, the club socialisation process is not often actively managed. Club socialisation tends to happen as a result of informal and discretionary interactions with other members. The findings from this study suggest a more managed approach is needed. Rather than leave socialisation to chance and allow newcomers to find their own way, clubs should develop a strategy for orientating new members, helping them to assimilate and feel comfortable at their club. From the resultant pool of established members, golf clubs can then seek to activate volunteers. By proactively managing the socialisation process through planned activities, clubs can increase the quantity and diversity of potential volunteers.

While a range of socialisation strategies are available (Van Maanen and Schein, 1979; Jablin, 2011), this research found that golf clubs' active management of new member socialisation was partial. Where there were efforts to socialise members, they tended to be sporadic and not part of a comprehensive socialisation strategy. The club socialisation model proposed in this study offers a framework for a more strategic approach. In particular, the club socialisation model can be used to develop strategies to reduce newcomer uncertainty and to manage the assimilation and activation transition stages. The following paragraphs discuss strategic options, with more detailed practical recommendations for golf clubs provided in Table 27 in section 9.4.2 of the conclusion chapter.

In considering club socialisation strategies, it is important to recognise the significant role played by social relations. In particular, the group relations aspect of club socialisation is both a strength and a weakness. The current club

socialisation process is a strength because it tends to generate committed volunteers that have a deep and meaningful regard for their volunteering. However, the process also tends to favour the assimilation of like-minded people and discourage diversity. Effective strategies need to build on these strengths but also address the weaknesses.

In developing a new member socialisation strategy, sports clubs should first consider ways to *reduce uncertainty for new members*. This can be done by lowering cultural barriers and implementing a newcomer orientation programme. Since strong dominant cultures create uncertainty for newcomers, sports clubs can reduce uncertainty by limiting the number of rules and behavioural expectations of new members. This does not mean that sports clubs should cast aside their culture and tradition. Rather, it means assessing what cultural practices, behavioural norms and rules are useful and what can be relaxed or relinquished. For golf clubs with declining memberships, it seems increasingly absurd to expect new members to make large adjustments to fit in with the club's traditional way of doing things. Furthermore, newcomers should be offered an orientation programme, which provides information and guidance on the club. By relaxing cultures and providing new member orientation programmes, clubs should be able to reduce uncertainty for new members.

The *management of newcomer assimilation* should form a central feature of every sports club's socialisation strategy. The club socialisation model suggests strategies will be effective if they help new members spend time at the club, form relationships with other members and improve their playing confidence. Most sports clubs are probably familiar with supporting newcomers to improve their playing abilities, with coaching a regular feature of club life. Encouraging newcomers to spend more time at the club and to form social relations is perhaps less obvious, yet the model suggests these are also important. Encouraging members to spend more time at the club may be possible with strategies to integrate other life commitments, especially work and family. Crucially, sports clubs must give new members ample opportunities to form

social relationships. Helping newcomers form relationships with other new members should help them navigate common uncertainties together and provide mutual support. Providing newcomers with introductions to like-minded established members may also be effective at fostering group relations. Clubs that permit or, better still, cultivate a variety of sub-cultures in their club should be better placed to help newcomers find their group. Thus, by supplementing sporting development with more opportunities to form supportive social relationships, this study's findings suggest that sports clubs would be more successful at assimilating new members.

Finally, the *strategic management of volunteer activation* provides sports clubs with opportunities to recruit high-quality volunteers and involve members with change aspirations. This is important because, as suggested by this research, volunteer recruitment in voluntary sports clubs is rooted in social relationships. Although best practice guidance on volunteer recruitment tends to recommend formal strategies, including the advertisement of all vacancies and formal selection procedures (NCVO, 2020), there was limited evidence of such practice in associational golf clubs. Formal recruitment methods may have limited impact in clubs where social relationships are highly valued. A more realistic approach may be to encourage sports clubs to approach word-of-mouth recruitment strategically. A strategic word-of-mouth approach would involve reaching out across the club's entire social networks when recruiting volunteers. Rather than relying on the social relationships of a few key decision-makers, all existing volunteers could be actively encouraged to discuss vacant roles among their friendship and playing groups within the club. Thus, volunteer recruitment could be enhanced by making it an inclusive and collective activity. If roles were advertised alongside these efforts, thereby ensuring everyone had access to accurate and complete information about role vacancies, the combined impact on volunteer recruitment could be significant.

Importantly, volunteer recruitment provides an opportunity to involve members with an orientation towards change. This is especially important for

golf clubs that are struggling to survive and need to improve performance. Volunteer recruitment strategy could reasonably target established members with comparatively short playing and membership histories, thereby tapping into fresh perspectives.

The impact of club socialisation on volunteer recruitment is pertinent given the growing emphasis placed by sport policy-makers on diversifying sports participation and volunteering (HM Government, 2015; Sport England, 2016b, 2017). Although new Sport England strategies are forthcoming, it seems certain that they will maintain the focus on inspiring and recruiting participants from diverse backgrounds. This presents a challenge for golf, whose participants and volunteers do not share the diversity of the wider population. If golf wants to be in the vanguard of sports development, it needs to make sure that the sport is more accessible to a diverse population. The findings from this research suggest that England Golf can make progress on diversity by encouraging clubs to actively manage the process of club socialisation. In this way, golf clubs should become better placed to attract and retain a more diverse membership. In turn, this should help to build a more diverse pipeline of potential volunteers. There are, of course, significant challenges for England Golf in persuading clubs to take positive actions on club socialisation, not least because voluntary sports clubs are seldom effective conduits for policy implementation (Harris et al., 2009; Adams, 2011; Donaldson et al., 2012). Perhaps England Golf's best chance of persuading associational golf clubs to act is to appeal to their desire to improve member recruitment and retention and reverse the long-term decline in club membership.

8.3 Volunteer-member discussions

8.3.1 Summary of findings

In the second theme of this study, the research focussed on how discussions between volunteers and members shaped volunteers' experiences and their club commitment. This section discusses these findings. After a brief summary of the findings below, this section outlines how volunteer-member discussions relate to theories of informal democracy in voluntary associations. The section goes on to consider the implications for theory on sports club volunteering. At the end, there is a discussion on how golf clubs can manage the member communication environment to support volunteers, including consideration of how England Golf can integrate this study's findings into their club support programme.

The findings on volunteer-member discussions are summarised in diagrammatic form in Figure 13 below. The findings suggest that informal discussions between volunteers and members influence the experience of golf club volunteers. Constructive discussions with members help volunteers to feel supported. This happens when discussions are significant and meaningful, based on full and accurate information, inclusive, based on reasoned argument and conducted respectfully. In contrast, destructive discussions with members are a source of frustration to volunteers. This happens when discussions are about trivial issues, based on misinformation, exclusive, held with members trying to legitimise their views by their status and conducted aggressively. In the golf clubs studied, it was clear that destructive discussions with members adversely affected volunteer enthusiasm. Constructive discussions with members helped to sustain volunteers' enthusiasm for their club and its members.

Figure 13 - The dimensions of volunteer-member discussions and how they affect volunteers
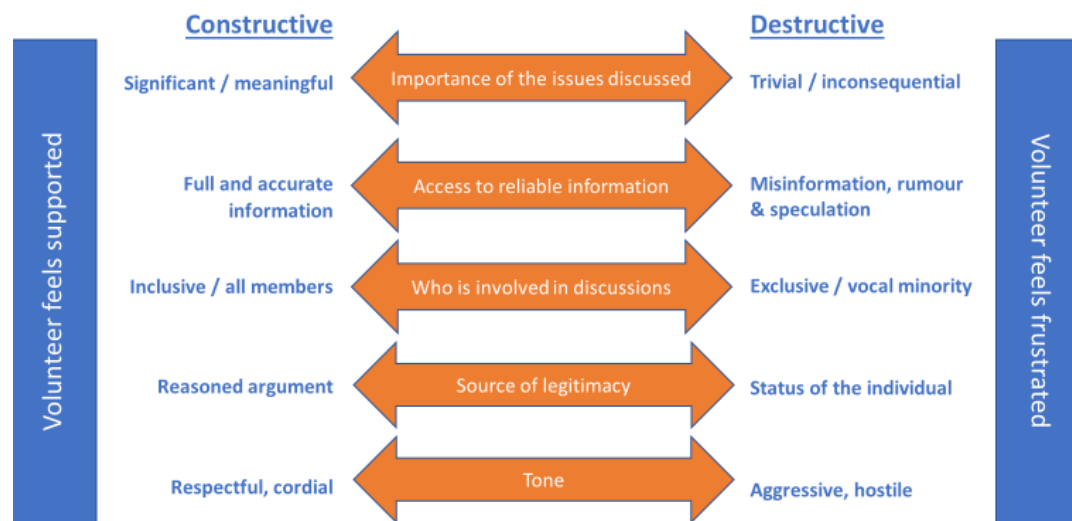
The findings demonstrate how, through their role, volunteers come into more contact with more members. This is significant because voluntary sports clubs are democratic organisations. Members have a democratic stake in the organisation and their opinions matter. Members are not just customers. As such, the following discussion relates volunteer-member discussions to the democratic character of voluntary sports clubs.

8.3.2   Volunteer-member discussions and deliberative democracy

Volunteer-member discussions represent everyday golf club talk. As illustrated by the findings, members discuss with volunteers what they want and how they think the club should be run. For example, members talked to volunteers about the condition of the golf course, the allocation of tee times, the dress code, the state of the changing rooms, the club's catering and team selection. In this way, member discussion is similar to the informal club democracy conceptualised by Ibsen et al. (2019), which involves members sharing views with others and speaking to key people in the club. Ibsen et al.'s conceptualisation of informal democracy draws on the idea of participatory democracy, whereby members are collectively responsible for pursuing common interests and shared goals. It is consistent with the idea that associations are at their strongest when

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members are actively encouraged to participate in decision-making (Elstub, 2008). Yet, the volunteer-member discussions described in this study are perhaps indicative of an even more informal type of discussion, similar to the 'dialogic deliberation' conceptualised by Kim and Kim (2008). Dialogic deliberation extends the scope of deliberative democracy beyond the formal political system to informal places where individuals can engage in everyday political talk. In this type of everyday political talk, there is no immediate formal decision to be made. People discuss issues and explore mutual understanding informally as part of their everyday life.

The constructive form of volunteer-member discussions conceptualised in this study resonates with the concept of deliberation, which is found in works on deliberative democracy (Dryzek, 2002, 2010; Elstub, 2008; Fishkin, 2011; Steiner, 2012). While deliberative democracy is a contested concept, deliberation can be broadly understood as a communication process that allows people to consider issues and provide reasons to support arguments. Through deliberation, members of a community can resolve conflict and generate shared solutions. Whilst deliberative democracy has been developed as an instrumental process to underpin and legitimise democratic decision-making in the public realm, it is also possible to embed deliberation within associations (Elstub, 2008). Indeed, whereas deliberative democracy has been criticised as unachievable in large and complex societies, it seems more practicable in associations where there is broad unity of purpose (Elstub, 2008). In the case of golf clubs, the concentration of members at one location and the highly social aspect of club membership provides a suitable arena for member deliberation. Constructive discussions among members and volunteers can, therefore, be interpreted as an exploration of issues through reasoned argument and a way of reaching compromise or consensus. Thus, disagreements about how the club should be run can be resolved. Such constructive discussion appears to offer a deliberative means of establishing mutual understanding and a sense of community (Kim and Kim, 2008).

Table 23 below compares the characteristics of deliberation (Fishkin and Luskin, 2005) with the features of constructive volunteer-member discussions. It highlights the similarities between the two concepts.

Table 23 - Comparing deliberation and constructive volunteer-member discussions

Features of key concepts		Comparative analysis
Deliberative discussion (Fishkin and Luskin, 2005)	**Constructive volunteer-member discussions**	
Informed: Arguments should be supported by appropriate and reasonably accurate factual claims.	*Full and accurate information:* Members have access to reliable information. Discussion is well-informed and does not rely on rumour and misinformation.	Both concepts recognise that reliable information is an essential ingredient for reasoned argument. Members require information to be able to develop informed opinions.
Balanced: Arguments should be matched by contrary arguments.	-	Volunteer-member discussions does not have a direct comparator for the 'balanced' feature of deliberative discussion. Deliberation is grounded in the notion of resolving competing arguments, hence the focus on balancing arguments. In golf clubs, where there is a common interest in playing golf, the divergence in competing arguments may be limited. This arguably places less emphasis on the need for balance.
Conscientiousness: Participants should be willing to talk and listen, with civility and respect.	*Respectful:* The tone of the discussion is respectful and cordial.	'Conscientiousness' and 'respect' are similar concepts. Both emphasise the need for individuals to respect each other. Whereas constructive discussion focusses on tone, deliberation's 'conscientiousness' is more expansive in requiring individuals to listen.
Substantive: Arguments should be considered	*Reasoned argument:*	The two concepts are similar in requiring arguments to be assessed on their merits. Both concepts have

sincerely on their merits, not how they are made or who is making them.	The rationality of an individual's argument is valued over their individual status.	misgivings when individuals use their status to justify their position.
Comprehensive: All points of view held by significant portions of the population should receive attention.	**Inclusive:** All members of the club are included in discussions.	Both concepts recognise the importance of inclusivity. There is an assumption in both concepts that the best solutions emerge from diverse perspectives.
-	**Significant issues:** Volunteers and members discuss important issues concerning the club.	There is nothing in the features of deliberation about the significance of the issues discussed. There is, however, a presumption in deliberative democracy that issues are discussed when individual preferences conflict. Deliberative democracy is not intended to include everyday conversation. The inclusion of the 'significant issues' as a feature in volunteer-member discussions is arguably due to the micro-level of everyday politics analysed in our study of golf clubs and the need to distinguish important issues from trivial matters.

Fishkin (2011) has argued that deliberation reduces partisanship and encourages greater understanding of opposing views. Furthermore, with deliberation, a shared consensus is more likely to emerge. This inspires greater commitment to subsequent decisions and promotes group cohesion. If this analysis is extended into the golf club context, deliberation appears to offer the means to address differences of opinion between members. There were examples from this study's findings in which different opinions about dress codes and capital expenditure had been resolved when members listened to the other side of the argument (e.g. see quotes from A1 and E6 in section 6.4.2). Importantly, by discussing issues in deliberative ways, there is the possibility of enhancing the sense of togetherness that volunteers and members feel.

The destructive type of volunteer-member discussions, as conceptualised in this study, is not consistent with deliberative democracy. Indeed, destructive volunteer-member discussions have the feel of representative-delegative democracy rather than participatory-inclusive democracy (Stadelmann-Steffen and Freitag, 2011). In representative-delegative models of democracy, decision-making power is delegated away from members to elected representatives. Members are not encouraged to get involved in debates, which is potentially problematic. While governing bodies of associations may be democratically elected, over-reliance on aggregative majority-rules democracy tends to drive dissenters from the group as they feel they have no say (Johnson, 1990; Elstub, 2008). Thus, associations that rely wholly on representative-delegative democracy risk concentrating power in the hands of a few.

The risk of associations becoming self-perpetuating oligarchies run by the committed minority are well-established (Horton Smith, 2000; Hill, 2002). Since associations with large memberships may tend towards the centralisation of decision making and more formal democracy (Horton Smith, 2000), golf clubs are perhaps at greater risk of becoming oligarchies than other smaller sports clubs. The potential effects of concentrated power are apparent in the features of destructive volunteer-member discussions. In destructive volunteer-member discussions, those without power are deprived of information and absent from the debate, whereas high-status members use their standing to legitimise their preferences. In associational golf clubs, this appears to be reflected in the way that volunteer-member discussions tended to be dominated by the '*old guard*', representing a core of high-status members that wanted to preserve the status quo. Some volunteers were frustrated by what they perceived as the passivity of most members. Destructive volunteer-member discussions could, therefore, be considered an indicator of a minimalist informal democracy.

However, some volunteers were keen to improve the quality and inclusivity of informal debates, gain support for their projects and achieve change within their golf club. For example, this study found evidence of volunteers actively

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sharing information about golf course maintenance and improvements, thereby promoting informed discussions among members about the management of the golf course. Informal deliberative discussions of this nature provided a useful mechanism to resolve otherwise contested issues. Kim and Kim (2008) note how dialogic deliberation involves the exploration of mutual understanding with others. They also argue that everyday political talk logically and practically precedes formal deliberation and therefore acts as a useful foundation for more formal forms of democracy. In the context of associations, this means that internal democracy is not confined to a reliance on the annual general assembly of members, where voting tends to aggregate pre-determined competitive preferences (Hendriks, 2009). Rather, dialogic deliberation emphasises the importance of deliberation before formal decision-making. Decisions are, therefore, informed by prior collective reasoning and mutual understanding. Constructive volunteer-member discussions would seem to provide a basis for a more consensual formal democracy and decision-making.

Finally, in considering the theoretical conceptualisation of volunteer-member discussions, it is worth making a broader point about the health of internal democracies in voluntary associations. Voluntary associations, including voluntary sports clubs, have long been regarded as a cornerstone of western society, acting as 'schools of democracy' to socialise members into social and democratic ways (De Tocqueville, 2003) and creating social capital as a public good (Putnam, 2000). In these analyses, associations are generally regarded as a beneficial force. There is, however, a tendency among sports researchers and policy-makers to assume that community sport is necessarily a force for good (Coalter, 2007). As highlighted by this study, it cannot be assumed that all associations have healthy internal democracies. This study has suggested that informal democratic participation in associational golf clubs may sometimes involve destructive discussions which leave participants frustrated. As such, voluntary association democracy may not necessarily provide a positive schooling in democracy.

8.3.3   Implications for sports club volunteering theory

This study's findings illustrate how volunteers play a central role in the informal democracies of golf clubs. The volunteer-member discussions identified in this study are much like the informal democracy conceptualised by Ibsen et al. (2019), which was defined as members sharing views with others and speaking to key people in the club. This study shows how golf club members are attracted to talk about everyday politics to volunteers because they play an active role in running the golf club. For example, members talk to the Chair of Greens or other board members if they feel that the golf course should be managed differently. That volunteers have a role in governing and running their club means that they attract comment from members. These findings may help to explain why Ibsen et al. (2019), in their pan-European study across ten countries and a range of sports, found that regular volunteers in sports clubs participate more in informal democracy than other members. To be a club volunteer is to be involved in the everyday political life of the sports club.

The way that social interaction and everyday politics interweave is a significant feature of volunteer-member discussions. Social interactions are fundamental to golf club volunteers' involvement in informal democracy. Through volunteering, volunteers encounter social interactions that extend beyond their playing and social groups. A Chair of Greens summed this up nicely by saying that, because he had a role in the club, '*people will come and talk to me'*. Golf club volunteering is, therefore, much like other community sport volunteering in that it is characterised by extensive social interaction (Doherty and Misener, 2008). It is apparent from this research that the quality of those social interactions has a significant impact on the volunteering experience. This study's findings support the argument that positive social interactions improve the volunteer experience (Schlesinger and Nagel, 2018; Wegner et al., 2019).

The findings from this study also demonstrate how negative social interactions can be detrimental to the volunteer experience. In this regard, there are

similarities to Misener et al.'s (2010) findings that negative interpersonal relations are common among sport club volunteers, which can be a source of tension and anxiety for volunteers. Volunteers in this study variously described how interactions with members were '*upsetting*', '*a pain in the neck*' and had a '*wearing effect*'. Positive social interactions between members and volunteers are not a given. Although sports club members come together to pursue a shared enthusiasm, voluntary sports clubs are not necessarily embodiments of social and political unity. As this study has shown, voluntary sports club members may have different ideas, interests and opinions, and may express them in less than constructive ways.

This study's findings suggest that golf club volunteering is not supported by a club environment where the majority of members remain passive and silent, thereby allowing everyday political talk to be the preserve of a minority of members. Yet, it is easy to see why golf clubs may tend toward destructive discussion. Since golf clubs typically have larger memberships than other sports clubs (Sport and Recreation Alliance, 2016), there may be a tendency to rely on formal representative-delegative democracy. This accords with research covering a range of national contexts that finds lower levels of democratic participation by members in larger sports clubs (Schlesinger et al., 2013; Wicker et al., 2014; Ibsen et al., 2019). However, the argument that large memberships result in lower democratic participation tends towards a fatalistic view of sports club life, whereby clubs are merely subject to structural influences. More recognition is required of the role that informal democracy and everyday political talk can play in engaging members in club affairs. Indeed, while this study has highlighted the negative impact of destructive discussion, it has also highlighted the positive influence of constructive discussion.

The findings from this research suggest that constructive volunteer-member discussions help volunteers feel supported by fellow members. Other research has already shown how volunteers are more likely to be satisfied and sustain their volunteering when they feel support and solidarity from other club

members (Rundle-Thiele and Auld, 2009; Schlesinger et al., 2019). The active recognition of volunteers is frequently cited as an important means of showing support for volunteers (Einolf, 2018; Nagel et al., 2019). This research is distinctive, however, in emphasising how the exploration of mutual understandings through deliberative discussion has the potential to enhance volunteers' feelings of support. It suggests that promoting deliberative discussion within voluntary sports clubs may be one of the best ways of making volunteers feel the support of club members. Importantly, the findings from this research suggest that constructive volunteer-member discussions are conducive to the development of a sense of togetherness. For example, it was noteworthy how Club C's board had engaged with the membership in developing a club vision and strategy and, as a result, felt a strong sense of member support. Thus, through constructive discussions, golf club volunteers can explore mutual understanding with members and resolve disagreements through reasoned argument. By exploring mutual understanding with members, volunteers can develop a greater sense of belonging.

Overall, this study suggests that associational golf clubs should not solely rely on formal representative-delegative forms of democracy. When managing golf clubs in an age of growing managerialism and consumerism, it may be tempting to rely on representative-delegative democracy. However, golf clubs should be wary of apolitical assumptions that efficiency, effectiveness and customer satisfaction are all that is needed for a successful golf club, and that problematic issues are best left to the experts to resolve. This research suggests that there are dangers associated with a decline in informal forms of club democracy. In particular, volunteering in golf clubs is embedded within the membership and volunteers rely on a healthy informal democracy to feel supported and a sense of togetherness with members. Constructive discussion among members, which can be regarded as a form of informal deliberative democracy, should help to create a positive club operating environment for volunteers. Without it, destructive discussion may come to dominate and make volunteering increasingly unattractive.

8.3.4 Implications for club management

The findings on volunteer-member discussions have implications for golf clubs and for England Golf's volunteer strategy. The main implication is that associational golf clubs can support their volunteers by nurturing constructive discussion. Since golf club volunteers are involved in extensive social interactions with members and value the support they receive from members, those interactions must be constructive. Destructive discussions should not be allowed to dominate and frustrate the volunteer experience. Promoting an informal internal democracy that is deliberative should provide a supportive framework in which volunteers interact with members.

The promotion of deliberative discussion represents a different approach to supporting volunteers than the more managerial approaches common among the human resource management literature on volunteering (Cuskelly et al., 2006; Taylor et al., 2015). Managerial approaches, such as using recognition techniques, tend to be formal and instrumental in their approach. Where techniques are routine and mechanistic, they may lack resonance with volunteers. Indeed, interviewees in this study often said that formal recognition wasn't important to them, but that everyday member support was. Everyday recognition from members was more significant than grandiose awards. The challenge here, however, is controlling members and the way they voice their opinions. That said, while everyday member support is undoubtedly difficult to control, there are opportunities to create the right framework for members to engage constructively with volunteers.

By using the five dimensions of volunteer-member discussions as a framework, strategies can be developed to support informal deliberative democracy within sports clubs. These strategies are listed below, with detailed practical recommendations for golf clubs listed in Table 28 in section 9.3.2 of the conclusion chapter:

- Bring significant issues to the fore in club communications.

- Provide members with regular, accurate and reliable information.
- Make club discussions inclusive by encouraging all members to get involved.
- Value arguments based on their merits, not on who is making them.
- Promote civility and respect throughout the club.

As well as supporting volunteers, promoting informal deliberative democracy within voluntary sports clubs should have wider benefits. Importantly, encouraging constructive discussion among members should improve the health of club democracy and support better decision-making. Deliberative discussion ensures that issues are thoroughly explored before decisions are made. It also encourages inclusive participation and brings forward otherwise silent perspectives and different ideas and ways of doing things. In this regard, there are opportunities for golf clubs to embed within their membership a stronger sense of the value of inclusivity. Therefore, while the notion of constructive discussion has been developed in relation to volunteers, it should have wider positive benefits to associational golf clubs.

England Golf's current volunteer strategy sets out targets around volunteer happiness and increasing the diversity of volunteers at the decision-making level (England Golf, 2018b). This resonates with Sport England's volunteer strategy, which focusses on improving the volunteer experience and diversifying volunteering (Sport England, 2017). Promoting deliberative discussion within associational golf clubs provides a potential route towards meeting these objectives. This is because deliberative discussion enhances the support felt by volunteers and encourages a more diverse range of members to get involved in club affairs. The approach suggested here is, however, distinctive in focussing less on individual '*needs, motivations and barriers*' (Sport England, 2017: 4) and more on the wider club environment and how this supports participation in club affairs by all members. The findings of this study suggest that if clubs are first encouraged to address the health of their internal democracies, including the

deliberative quality of informal discussions, then better volunteer experiences and increased volunteer diversity are more likely to emerge.

8.4 Affective club commitment

8.4.1 Summary of findings

In the third and final theme of this study, the focus was on how volunteers *felt* about their golf club. The aim was to understand the nature of volunteers' organisational commitment. The term affective club commitment was used to capture the feelings that volunteers have towards their club. After a brief summary of the findings, this section outlines how this study's conceptualisation of affective club commitment compares to the conceptualisation of affective organisational commitment found in the literature. This section then goes on to consider the implications for theory on sports club volunteering and how golf clubs can encourage the development of affective club commitment among volunteers.

The findings from this study suggest that golf club volunteers' affective club commitment comprises a *sense of belonging*, a *feeling of involvement* and *pride in the club*. Volunteers' feelings towards their club are grounded in social relationships and the sense of belonging this creates. Feelings of involvement emerge from contributions made. Based on their sense of belonging and feeling of involvement, golf club volunteers can then feel pride in the club. Figure 14 below presents these findings in diagrammatic form.

Figure 14 - The concept of affective club commitment
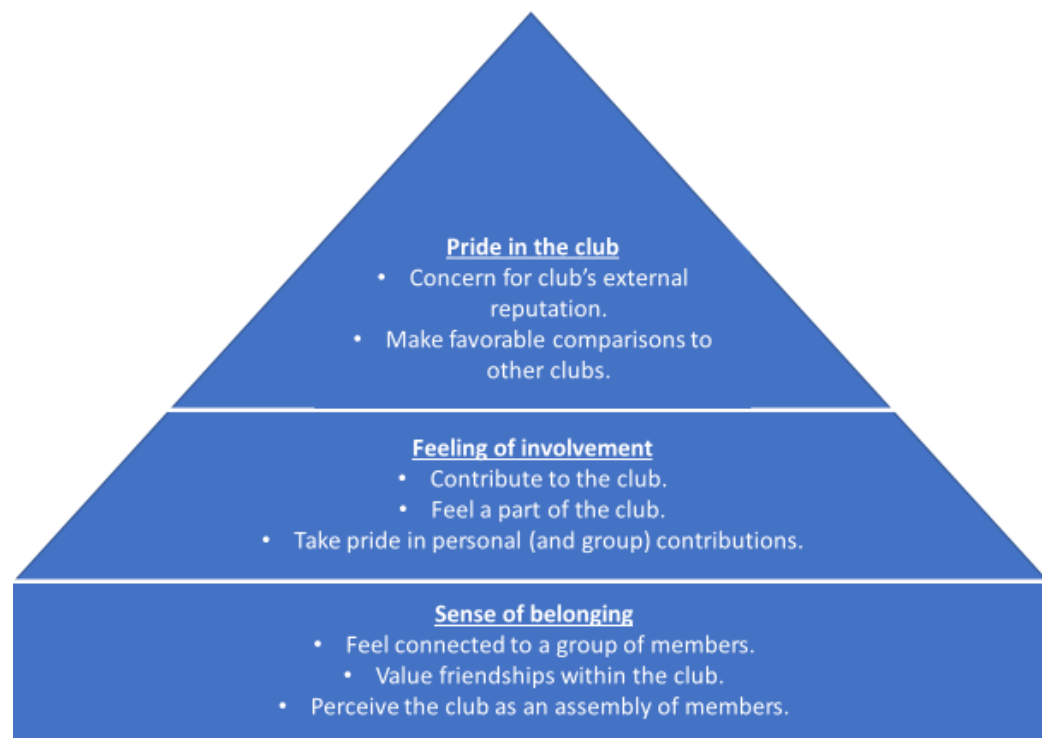
8.4.2   Implications for the conceptualisation of organisational commitment

While this study adopted an inductive approach to understanding the feelings that volunteers had towards their golf club, it produced a conceptualisation of affective club commitment that is similar to other prominent models of affective organisational commitment (Mowday et al., 1982; Meyer and Allen, 1997). Table 24 below compares established conceptualisations of affective organisational commitment to this study's affective club commitment. From this table, similarities between the dimensions of identification and belonging are evident. There are also similarities with the shared dimension of involvement. There are, however, some critical differences including: the way that feelings of belonging are principally targeted towards other members; how feelings of involvement arise from voluntary contributions made; and, the way that commitment builds through layered feelings. These differences are discussed below.

Table 24 - Comparing affective organisational commitment and club commitment

	Affective organisational commitment	**Affective club commitment**
Identification & belonging	Identification with the organisation. Includes feelings of belonging, being part of the family and internalising the organisation's problems (Meyer and Allen, 1997). Also includes an affinity to the organisation's values and a desire to maintain membership of the organisation (Mowday et al., 1982).	A sense of belonging to the club, which is primarily based on feeling strongly connected to a group of other members.
Involvement	Involvement with the organisation. Includes a willingness to maintain involvement in the organisation (Meyer and Allen, 1997) and to exert effort on behalf of the organisation (Mowday et al., 1982).	A feeling of involvement that arises from voluntary contributions made to the club.
Other	-	Pride in the club, which is expressed as a concern for the club's external reputation.

A key difference between the two concepts arises in the feature of *belonging*. In this study's conceptualisation of affective club commitment, the principle target of volunteers' attachment is other club members with whom they have social relationships. Many of these social relationships were formed as a member before volunteering. The volunteers interviewed in this study frequently talked about the members they played golf with and the bonds that they had with them. They described how their fellow members were '*a great group'* and were '*rooting for each other'*. Although interviewees often described how '*friendship within the club'* seemed unique to them, these meaningful relationships were experienced by volunteers across all golf clubs. Affective commitment to the club is, therefore, firmly rooted in relationships that are more than just mere acquaintances. The sense of belonging is social in its formation and expression. While conceptualisations of affective organisational commitment also include a sense of belonging, the nature of that belonging is more ambiguous. Meyer and

Allen (1997: 118) note that affectively committed employees have a 'strong sense of belonging' and 'feel part of the family' at their organisation. Mowday et al. (1982) also note employees' feelings of loyalty towards their organisation and how they do not wish to leave. These conceptualisations of affective organisational commitment are inclusive of the importance of social relations, but they are also open to different interpretations concerning the targets of belonging. For example, the targets of belonging could be the organisation as a whole, fellow employees or the organisation's clients or customers. Neither conceptualisation of affective organisational commitment explicitly attributes an individual's sense of belonging to their relationships with a particular group of people in the organisation. In contrast, in the conceptualisation of affective club commitment, there is an explicit focus on the sense of belonging to a group of other members in the club.

Affective club commitment does not share affective organisational commitment's emphasis on organisational identification. In the conceptualisation of affective organisational commitment, there is an emphasis on identification, which involves individuals identifying with the goals and policies of the organisation (Mowday et al., 1982) and regarding the problems of the organisation as their own (Meyer and Allen, 1997). In this study, interviewees seldom talked about the goals and values of their golf club. This could be because volunteers were less inclined to use managerial language. It could also be because a shared interest in playing golf is an inherent and obvious assumption of being a golf club member and so is not talked about explicitly. Yet, while there may be other golf clubs with similar goals and values, it was clear that volunteers chose to stay with their current club. This study's inductively derived research findings suggest that they stay because of their social relationships and group attachments. Volunteers' principle bonds, more often than not, were with people inside the golf club. These social and group relations feature more highly as a bond than any identification with the club's goals. That is not to say that some volunteers don't identify with their golf club. Rather, it is suggested that a sense of belonging is more prominent and

universal. This study's conceptualisation of a sense of belonging simply notes that volunteers have developed social relationships with other members, feel at ease in their company, value these friendships and wish to maintain those relationships.

Turning now to the dimension of *involvement*, Table 24 indicates that involvement is a feature of both affective organisational commitment and affective club commitment. Furthermore, the table shows how the conceptualisations of involvement are similar. They both revolve around an active relationship between the individual and the organisation, rather than the individual remaining passive. However, in affective club commitment, there is a clearer sense that the feeling of involvement arises out of participation. By making a voluntary contribution to the organisation, members felt involved. Unlike in affective organisational commitment (Mowday et al., 1982; Meyer and Allen, 1997), this sense of involvement was not expressed as an intention. Rather, it was expressed as a recognition of voluntary contributions already made. This key distinction may arise because within voluntary sports clubs there is no absolute expectation that members will make a voluntary contribution. They can remain passive non-volunteering members if they wish. In employment settings, such passivity is not an option and employees are expected to exert effort on behalf of the organisation - at least if the employee wishes to avoid the sack! That same compulsion is not present in voluntary sports clubs. Therefore, the feeling of involvement derived from voluntarily contributing has a special meaning.

In this study, the special sense of involvement that comes from volunteering was best demonstrated within Club C, where the members had recently taken on ownership of the club. Interviewees frequently contrasted their current feelings of involvement with the way they felt when the club was previously in private ownership. Their feeling of involvement was now greatly amplified because they were responsible for the club and had voluntarily put in the effort to make improvements. They could see the product of their labours all around

them and were able to enjoy the benefits themselves as members. Thus, it was the voluntary nature of the volunteers' contributions, and the subsequent consumption of the clubs' services as members, that created a special sense of involvement.

Another difference between the conceptualisation of affective club commitment and affective organisational commitment is found in the understanding of pride. While discussing the organisation with people outside of it (Meyer and Allen, 1997) and being proud to tell others about organisational membership (Mowday et al., 1982) are included in conceptualisations of affective organisational commitment, these components are not given special prominence. In contrast, pride in the club is treated as a separate dimension in affective club commitment. The clear separation of pride in the club within affective club commitment arises because it is distinguished as a feeling towards the club as a whole, whereas belonging tends to be felt towards other members and involvement towards contributions made. Affective organisational commitment does not make the same links between feelings and the principal targets of these feelings. In the basic models of affective organisational commitment, the target of all feelings is the organisational as a whole.

This leads us to consider how affective club commitment entails a building up or layering of feelings, which is not shared by the conceptualisation of affective organisational commitment. In affective organisational commitment, there is no sense of how the various dimensions of feeling relate to one another and develop. There is, for example, no sense of how some feelings provide a foundation for other emotions to develop. This appears to present limitations when considering the affective organisational commitment of volunteers in membership-based organisations because some feelings develop as a member prior to volunteering. Affective club commitment firmly roots commitment in social and group relationships and a sense of belonging to other members. These feelings develop as members prior to volunteering. Feelings of

involvement stem from contributions made and are formed through volunteering. It is on these feelings of belonging and involvement that a wider concern for the club rests. As such, this study proposes that commitment builds from the foundations of belonging and involvement, and then transcends into pride in the whole organisation. Through this layering, affective club commitment offers a way of integrating feelings towards intra-organisational targets, including other members, contributions made and the organisation as a whole. In other words, belonging and involvement, which may have targets particular to each individual's social relationships and voluntary contributions, underpin a higher-level pride in the whole organisation.

Importantly, although the conceptualisation of affective club commitment provides a framework for thinking about volunteers' feelings towards their club, this study also emphasises how each individual's commitment is shaped by their own experience. Affective club commitment is an expression of each individual's experience in their club, including the groups they belong to and the contributions they make. No two volunteers share the same affective club commitment. Every volunteer has different social relationships and makes a distinctive contribution, thereby shaping commitment in different ways. For example, in Club B, whereas a course maintenance volunteer's sense of belonging was principally towards his regular playing group and his feeling of involvement towards the golf course, a board member's sense of belonging was towards her friends in the ladies section and her feeling of involvement towards the clubhouse that she had helped decorate. While these feelings may transcend into overall pride in the club, which may look similar for many volunteers, the experiences and meanings that underpin organisational pride may be very different.

8.4.3   Implications for sports club volunteering theory

The findings from this study encourage us to think about how to conceptualise affective organisational commitment among volunteers in voluntary sports clubs. As outlined in section 8.4.2, comparisons can be made between the

concept of affective organisational commitment applied by other sport sector researchers using deductive logic and the affective club commitment constructed in this study using inductive reasoning. This research prompts us to consider whether it is necessary to develop a distinctive and contextually sympathetic form of organisational commitment to comprehend how volunteers feel about their voluntary sports club.

Previous sports studies have tended to import the concept of affective organisational commitment to the study of sports club volunteers, even though the concept was developed through employment research (Cuskelly et al., 1998; Cuskelly and Boag, 2001; Hoye, 2007; Engelberg et al., 2012; Bang et al., 2013; Schlesinger et al., 2013, 2019). The similarities between affective organisational commitment and affective club commitment noted above in section 8.4.2 suggest that affective organisational commitment is reasonably well-suited to the sports club volunteering context. There are similarities between notions of belonging and identification and the dimension of involvement. Pride in the club and concern for what outsiders think about the club also feature in both conceptualisations. The two conceptualisations are not far apart and, it could be argued, the differences are not much more than semantic. That said, given the distinctive features of voluntary sports clubs, it is worthwhile considering the justification for a native conceptualisation (Doherty, 2013).

The findings from this study suggest that the distinctive features of the organisational context shape the commitment found among golf club volunteers. In particular, the role of voluntary sports clubs in providing social interactions for members emphasises the foundational importance of belonging. Furthermore, members' shared ownership of their clubs and their voluntary character emphasises the importance of involvement. In the conceptualisation of affective club commitment, these contextual features are reflected in the way the concept is layered and built upwards from a sense of belonging and through feelings of involvement. Importantly, this study's

conceptualisation suggests that notions of pride in the whole club are reliant on these two building blocks being in place. The conceptualisation of affective organisational commitment, derived as it is from employment research, does not tease out the foundational basis of belonging and involvement in the same way.

To further build the case for this study's conceptualisation of affective club commitment, it is helpful to consider other evidence from sports research. The remainder of this section, therefore, brings in relevant literature on belonging and targets of commitment.

In emphasising belonging as a key component of affective club commitment, this thesis finds support from literature. This thesis concurs with recent research arguing that the formation of social ties with other members helps to bind volunteers to their sports clubs (Schlesinger and Nagel, 2013; Schlesinger et al., 2019). It also resonates with research that found that bonding social ties between members creates a strong foundational sense of belonging (Darcy et al., 2014). In the case of golf clubs, group participation and feeling comfortable among friends were essential to members establishing strong foundational bonds to their club. It created a sense of belonging to a group of members, which was central to the formation of club commitment. This study has shown that, even in golf clubs, where there are several hundred members and it is impossible to know everyone, it is essential that members settle into a sub-group and find friendship.

Positioning a sense of belonging as the foundation of affective club commitment and noting how this transcends into pride in the overall club is potentially helpful in creating a hierarchy that integrates various targets for feelings. Engelberg et al., (2012, 2014) have previously suggested that volunteers distinguish their commitment between different targets, including the organisation, the volunteer role, other volunteers, athletes and the club community. Likewise, it is a finding from this study that volunteers have

multiple targets for their feelings, including other members, contributions made and the overall club. However, deconstructing affective organisational commitment into multiple commitments to different targets risks losing sight of how those commitments inter-relate. This study takes a different approach in trying to incorporate the most salient feelings and their principal targets into one combined notion of affective club commitment. Importantly, this study suggests that different feelings toward different targets provide a basis from which volunteers form a top layer of pride in the whole organisation. In this way, multiple targets of feelings are integrated into one overall conceptualisation of affective club commitment.

The hierarchy of feelings proposed by this study is also potentially helpful in understanding the development of affective organisational commitment among sports club volunteers, where organisational experience spans both membership and volunteering. In other words, it is helpful to have a conceptualisation of affective commitment that recognises how feelings develop over time, both as a member and then as a volunteer. Thus, affective club commitment can develop prior to volunteering as members forge social relationships and a sense of belonging. Researchers have tended to use affective organisational commitment to understand volunteers, but not use it more widely in the study of club members. Affective club commitment arguably links membership and commitment more clearly by showing how the development of social relations as a member fosters a sense of belonging. Furthermore, this study's conceptualisation of the feeling of involvement is based on contributions made rather than future intentions to contribute. This means that when a volunteer stands down, affective club commitment may persist because they still feel involvement from the contributions they have already made. Since volunteers that step down may remain members and maintain their social relationships, it is entirely plausible that high levels of affective club commitment are sustained post volunteering. In this way, affective club commitment is more attuned to the voluntary sports club context.

8.4.4   Implications for club management

By creating a more contextually sympathetic form of affective organisational commitment, this study highlights the most salient features of commitment among golf club volunteers. If golf clubs can support the development of the feelings that comprise affective club commitment, then it seems likely that members will more readily become and remain volunteers.

The findings from this study suggest that the development of affective club commitment can help with member retention. By positioning affective club commitment as a feeling that may develop before volunteering and endure after volunteering, it becomes a more useful club management goal. Thus, if clubs can foster a sense of belonging and involvement among their members, they are likely to see fewer members break club affiliations. This contrasts with affiliations restricted to the payment of fees in return for goods and services, which are transactional and more readily broken. Clubs are, therefore, advised to actively support the development of social relationships and participation among members.

By using the three dimensions of affective club commitment as a framework, strategies can be developed to support the development of commitment among volunteers. These strategies are listed below with detailed practical recommendations for golf clubs listed in Table 29 in section 9.4.4 of the conclusion chapter:

- Help members to develop *a sense of belonging* by supporting them to build social relationships within the club.
- Help members to develop *a feeling of involvement* by encouraging them to participate in the club.
- Help members to *feel pride in the club* by promoting the club's achievements.

8.5   The shaping of affective club commitment

8.5.1   Introduction

This thesis addresses the research question: How do volunteers' experiences within voluntary sports clubs shape their commitment to the organisation? This section returns to the question by discussing how the concepts constructed in this study relate to one another. The section begins by revisiting the volunteer process model, which was first introduced as a theoretical framework in section 2.4 of chapter 2. Each concept constructed in this study is placed within the volunteer process model. Other concepts raised in the sports research literature are also integrated to present a volunteer process model tailored to the context of voluntary sports clubs. All three concepts constructed in this thesis are then presented in diagrammatic form in section 8.5.3. This diagram illustrates the temporal nature to the development of affective club commitment and how the concepts combine over time. The diagram posits relationships between the concepts, which are then discussed in the remainder of the chapter. Thus, section 8.5.4 discusses how affective club commitment develops through the volunteer process. Key relationships between concepts are covered, looking at: club socialisation and affective club commitment in section 8.5.5; volunteering and affective club commitment in section 8.5.6; and, volunteer-member discussions and affective club commitment in section 8.5.7. The discussion ends by briefly addressing the assumption that affective club commitment enhances member and volunteer retention in section 8.5.8.

8.5.2   A revised volunteer process model

With the aim of integrating theory developed in this study with other sports club volunteering theory, Table 25 on the next page proposes a volunteer process model for voluntary sports clubs. The model utilises Snyder and Omoto's (2008) basic framework of stages and levels of analysis and populates the cells with concepts relevant to volunteering in voluntary sports club. Concepts are included based on this study's findings and sports research literature covered in this thesis. Concepts are also taken from Snyder and Omoto's model when relevant to voluntary sports clubs, although occasionally renamed to better fit the context.

The inclusion of concepts from this study in Table 25 shows how club socialisation as a member and volunteer-member discussions are placed at the interpersonal level of analysis. These concepts sit alongside other similar interpersonal concepts already considered in the sports club volunteering research literature. This analysis shows that while this study's findings sit alongside an emerging body of sports research, this thesis also generates important new insights into the experience of sports club volunteers.

Table 25 - Volunteer process model for voluntary sports clubs

| Levels of Analysis	Stages of the Volunteer Process		
	Antecedents	**Experiences**	**Consequences**
Individual	Demographics (Burgham and Downward, 2005; Taylor et al., 2012; Hallmann, 2015) Socio-economic characteristics (Burgham and Downward, 2005; Taylor et al., 2012; Hallmann, 2015; Hallmann and Dickson, 2017; Schlesinger and Nagel, 2018) *Personality type* Motivations (Nichols et al., 2016) *Life circumstances*	Amount of voluntary contribution (Nichols, 2005; Ringuet-Riot et al., 2014) Satisfaction / frustration of role expectations (Bang et al., 2013; Sheptak and Menaker, 2016)	*Knowledge* *Attitude change* **Affective club commitment** as a more contextually sympathetic form of affective organisational commitment (Cuskelly et al., 1998; Cuskelly and Boag, 2001; Engelberg et al., 2012; Schlesinger et al., 2013, 2019) Wellbeing (Wicker and Downward, 2020)
Inter-personal	Club membership (Burgham and Downward, 2005; Schlesinger and Nagel, 2013; Hallmann, 2015) **Club socialisation** Social relationships with other members (Cuskelly and O'Brien, 2013; Schlesinger and Nagel, 2013)	**Volunteer-member discussions** Support / opposition from other members (Rundle-Thiele and Auld, 2009; Misener et al., 2010; Nagel et al., 2019) Conviviality within the club (Schlesinger and Nagel, 2018; Wegner et al., 2019) Social cohesion among volunteers (Doherty and Carron, 2003)	*Social networks* *Relationship development*
Organ-isation	Organisational characteristics (Østerlund, 2013; Schlesinger and Nagel, 2013; Hallmann and Dickson, 2017; Swierzy et al., 2018) Volunteer recruitment (Schlesinger et al., 2015) *Training*	Club size (Wicker and Breuer, 2013b; Wicker et al., 2014; Schlesinger and Nagel, 2018) Organisational management (Cuskelly et al., 1998; Rundle-Thiele and Auld, 2009; Harman and Doherty, 2014) Volunteer management, including recognition (Graham Cuskelly et al., 2006; Nagel et al., 2019) *Organisational culture*	*Volunteer retention* *Organisational performance*
Societal	*Ideology* *Societal culture*	*Sports NGB policy* *Service provision*	*Social capital* *Economic savings*

Key: - Normal font – concepts already present in sports research literature.
       - Bold font – concepts raised by this study.
       - *Italic font* – concepts taken and/or adapted from Snyder and Omoto's (2008) model.

8.5.3   Diagrammatic representation of the grounded theory

Figure 15 below summarises in diagrammatic form the grounded theory presented in this thesis. The diagram integrates the main concepts of club socialisation, volunteer-member discussions and affective club commitment, which have been constructed in this study of golf club volunteers.

Figure 15 – A model for understanding volunteer engagement in English associational golf clubs
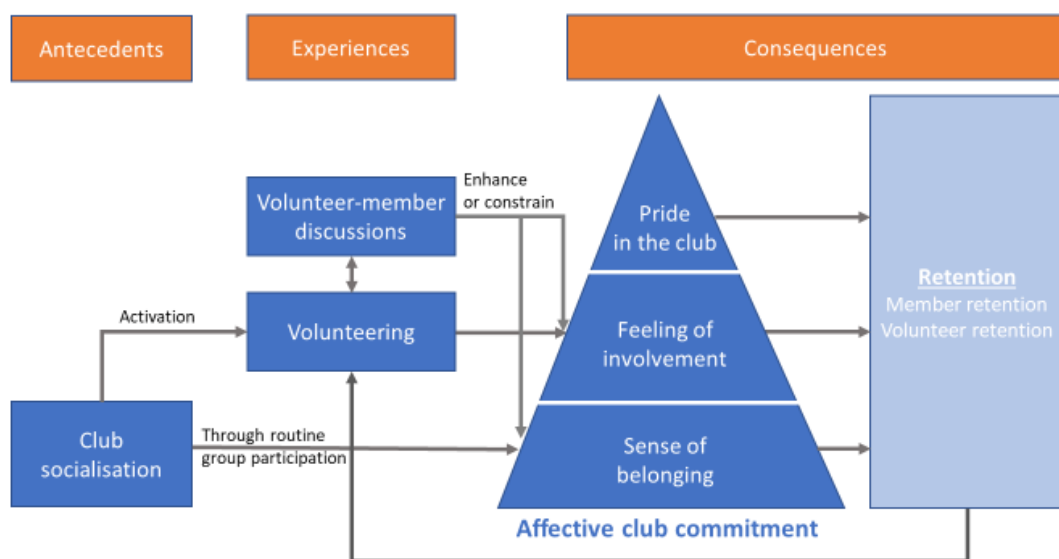
The diagram provides a useful guide to the discussion of the relationships between concepts that follows in sections 8.5.4 through to 8.5.8. In presenting the flow of concepts from left to right, the diagram reflects how the development of affective club commitment among golf club volunteers has a temporal nature to it. The diagram also represents a process whereby a series of experiences and actions lead to the formation of affective club commitment. That said, whilst the diagram uses arrows to indicate the relationships between concepts, these shouldn't be interpreted as causal influences. Progress through the process is contingent on positive events and social interactions at the antecedent and experience stages. As has been illustrated through this study's findings and shall be discussed further below, bad experiences may impede, constrain or damage affective club commitment.

Figure 15 makes linkages between affective club commitment and member and volunteer retention. Since this study did not explicitly consider these linkages, the diagram displays the concept of retention in a lighter blue. There is good evidence from other studies, however, that affective club commitment supports volunteer retention, and this is discussed further in section 8.5.8.

8.5.4   The process of shaping affective club commitment

The presentation of the volunteer process in three stages (antecedents, experiences and consequences) is consistent with this study's findings that affective club commitment develops and changes over time and builds through incidents and encounters. That the formation of organisational commitment is best characterised as a process that '*unfolds over time'* has been long understood (Mowday et al., 1982: 45). It is also well understood, especially within the context of voluntary sports clubs, that volunteers' commitment changes over time during the volunteering experience (Engelberg et al., 2014). Affective club commitment is rarely static or fixed. Both positive and negative experiences have an impact on affective club commitment. For example, findings from this research suggest that constructive volunteer-member discussions may enhance commitment, but that destructive volunteer-member discussions may harm it. Thus, while affective club commitment is often strengthened by the volunteering experience, it can also be undermined by it.

The findings from this study emphasise the importance of interpersonal relations in understanding the development of affective club commitment. All concepts listed in the antecedent and experience stages of the volunteer process model in Table 25, including those at the individual, interpersonal, organisational and societal level, could plausibly have some bearing on volunteers' affective club commitment. Nevertheless, this thesis makes a case for the importance of interpersonal influences. In particular, this study suggests that informal everyday interactions with other members are critical for the development and maintenance of affective club commitment. This study has shown how golf clubs are highly social organisations in which relationships

between members are an essential component. These findings add to a small body of qualitative research arguing that the interpersonal relations of volunteers are a significant feature of sports club volunteering (Rundle-Thiele and Auld, 2009; Misener et al., 2010; Cuskelly and O'Brien, 2013; Wegner et al., 2019).

8.5.5 Club socialisation and affective club commitment

The role that organisational socialisation plays in the development of affective organisational commitment is established within employment literature (Mowday et al., 1982; Klein and Weaver, 2000). However, unlike employees and many other volunteers, sports club volunteers are organisational members before they are volunteers. This represents a key distinction. As such, a sports club volunteer's organisational commitment cannot be fully understood merely by looking at their experience as a volunteer. Other sports research has suggested that social relationships and emotional commitments are under development as sports club members prior to volunteering (Cuskelly and O'Brien, 2013; Schlesinger et al., 2013). This study has also shown that much of the organisational socialisation of golf club volunteers takes place before they start volunteering. The way that volunteers settled into their club, formed relationships and became established members was fundamentally important to understanding a volunteer's feeling towards their club. The club socialisation process, which occurs as a member and fosters a sense of belonging, forms the bedrock of affective club commitment. Club socialisation as a member, therefore, becomes a vital antecedent to volunteering.

This study suggests that there is value in viewing greater continuity between voluntary sports club membership and volunteering, rather than treating them as separate phenomena. Thus, the movement between membership and volunteering represents a transition rather than an abrupt change (Cuskelly and O'Brien, 2013). Volunteering can then be viewed as an extension of club membership and participation. Attitudes and emotions that form as members flow over into volunteering. Accordingly, when studying sports club

volunteering, it is crucial to ground understanding in the broader context of organisational membership.

8.5.6   Volunteering and affective club commitment

If club socialisation forms the bedrock for affective club commitment, then volunteering has the capacity to enhance it. It is this study's contention that volunteering adds another layer to affective club commitment by stimulating feelings of involvement. This analysis has parallels to Cuskelly et al.'s (1998) findings that volunteers who spend more time doing their role tend to display higher levels of affective organisational commitment. In other words, the more one volunteers the more one feels involved and the more one becomes emotionally attached to the club. While this argument has merit, our study focusses less on time input and more on the meaningful nature of the contributions made.

It has been suggested that volunteers spend more time volunteering because they have high levels of affective organisational commitment (Engelberg et al., 2011). Here, Engelberg et al. appear to raise a different causal relationship to that proposed by Cuskelly et al. (1998) by suggesting that club commitment leads to spending more time volunteering. Helpfully, this study's findings allow for both interpretations by suggesting that club commitment is a multi-dimensional construct that includes feelings of belonging and feelings of involvement. This study's findings suggest that feelings of belonging emerge earlier as members develop social relationships within the club. Some level of affective club commitment may therefore form without active participation as a volunteer. Affective club commitment may then develop further through volunteering and the feelings of involvement that this generates. Affective club commitment thus forms iteratively as experiences of membership and volunteering interplay with feelings of belonging and involvement.

It is important to recognise that not all sports club volunteering is positive. Volunteering is not guaranteed to be a good experience, as demonstrated by

the incidence of destructive volunteer-member discussions in this study and findings from other research into sports club volunteers (Misener et al., 2010). Therefore, while time spent volunteering may lead to greater affective club commitment (Cuskelly et al., 1998), it is important to recognise that this is contingent on positive experiences and that not all volunteering experience is positive. Time spent volunteering and club commitment are interlinked, but not necessarily in a linear way. Enhanced affective club commitment is not a guaranteed outcome of volunteering.

8.5.7 Volunteer-member discussions and affective club commitment

The findings from this study indicate that as members become volunteers their radius of social interactions expands. They begin to encounter members beyond their own playing and social groups. Golf clubs, with an average of 484 members per club (England Golf, 2018a), are large in comparison to other sports clubs (Sport and Recreation Alliance, 2013) and the expansion in member encounters is often substantial. It is, therefore, understandable that these encounters may affect how volunteers feel about their golf club.

In this study, volunteers frequently spoke about how interactions with other members, and the quality of those interactions, was a major component of their volunteer experience. Volunteers also noted the impact of these interactions as they described how volunteer-member discussions could either frustrate or support them. The frustration that volunteers felt in dealing with *'moaning members'* was an especially prominent feature in the research data. Since associational golf clubs are highly social spaces and democratic organisations, it is perhaps unsurprising that volunteer-member discussions should influence how volunteers feel about their club. As shall be discussed below, the nature of volunteer-member discussions can influence a volunteer's affective club commitment, both through changes to their sense of belonging and their feeling of involvement.

The findings from this study suggest that a golf club volunteer's sense of belonging may alter because of their discussions with members. If the nature of volunteer-member discussions is constructive, this reinforces a sense of belonging. Through constructive volunteer-member discussions, volunteers share understanding with other members. This is consistent with a key benefit of deliberative democracy, whereby participants explore common interests and differences and move towards some form of consensus or, more realistically, compromise (Elstub, 2008). It is through the exploration of ideas and arguments that members co-produce meaning and build trust with one another. It provides a means of establishing mutual understanding and a sense of community (Kim and Kim, 2008). By interacting with a wider range of members, volunteers can expand their radius of belonging to more members. Thus, constructive volunteer-member discussions can foster a broader sense of belonging.

In contrast, destructive volunteer-member discussions, and an inability to resolve differences and reach consensus or compromise, may harm a volunteer's sense of belonging. As a volunteer's social encounters expand within the club, they may discover that members do not share their perspectives on how the golf club should be run. Receiving criticism from other members may be difficult because volunteers' feelings toward their club are grounded in social relations. In the research data, volunteers often interpreted their contribution as '*giving back'* to the club and its members. It is, therefore, understandable that volunteers should find it emotionally challenging to receive unreasonable criticism of their contributions from fellow members. That other members act unreasonably infringes a sense of shared understanding (Kim and Kim, 2008). This study's findings resonate strongly with a study of older volunteers by Misener et al. (2010) in which volunteers endured personal criticism or experienced a clash of perspectives with other club members. These negative interpersonal encounters caused tension, anxiety or disappointment. While Misener et al. didn't go on to explore whether these feelings transcended to the club more generally, they did indicate that the positive aspects of volunteering were generally sufficient to outweigh the negative experiences.

Similarly, the findings from this study suggest that volunteers may fall back on the sense of belonging that they have to their playing and friendship groups within the club, which formed during their socialisation as a member. That said, destructive volunteer-member discussions did leave some volunteers doubting their sense of belonging. It is, therefore, reasonable to argue that destructive volunteer-member discussions may constrain and occasionally damage a volunteer's sense of belonging to their club.

The findings from this study suggest that constructive volunteer-member discussions enhance volunteers' feelings of involvement by helping them to feel positive about their contribution. Golf club volunteers felt supported when they engaged in constructive discussion with members. There are similarities here with other research findings, which found that volunteers were more satisfied with their role and continue volunteering when they received support from other club members (Rundle-Thiele and Auld, 2009; Nagel et al., 2019). This resonates with the idea that recognition is important for volunteers (Einolf, 2018; Nagel et al., 2019). Indeed, this study's findings suggest that recognition from fellow members is especially important to volunteers in voluntary sports clubs. Deliberative democracy theory also suggests that the deliberative discussion of issues among community members should improve tolerance for opposing viewpoints, enhance the legitimacy of decisions made and lead to more support for actions taken (Steiner, 2012). Through constructive discussions, therefore, volunteers and members can come to a greater shared understanding of what is in their shared interests, which should then lead members to support the actions of volunteers. This should have a positive impact on volunteers' sense of involvement, including feelings of pride in their own contributions to the common good.

In contrast, the findings from this study suggest that destructive discussions risk damaging a volunteers' feelings of involvement by affecting how they feel about their own contributions. When members aggressively criticised volunteers' actions, some volunteers began to question their involvement. Such instances

were rare among the research participants, but the emotional impact was significant when it did happen. For example, when one golf course was badly affected by the weather and members were *'screaming about the condition of the course'*, a board member got to the point where he asked himself *'do I want to go down'* to the clubhouse. Other scholars have highlighted how volunteers expect to be valued and that they get frustrated if they believe the organisation does not value them (Sheptak and Menaker, 2016). If volunteers are frustrated by destructive discussions with members, this may constrain the extent to which they feel part of the club and take pride in their own contributions. As such, destructive volunteer-member discussions may constrain the feeling of involvement.

The findings from this research suggest that the nature of volunteer-member discussions is especially significant for volunteers who are from a younger demographic or desirous of change at their golf club. Through volunteering, younger adult members encounter the golf club's *'old guard'* more frequently. Reaching some form of consensus or compromise with more traditional members seemed integral to solidifying their affective club commitment. Where discussions with the *'old guard'* were destructive, this constrained or even damaged feelings of belonging and involvement. For example, a couple of junior organisers noted how the unsupportive opinions of some older members towards junior golf had left them feeling less optimistic about their role in the club. If the older generation is in the ascendency, as they are in most golf clubs, a lack of deliberative debate can leave young and progressive volunteers with little hope of making progress. They can become dispirited in their efforts to modernise the club. For example, one young volunteer felt that she should move to another club because older high-status members resisted her efforts to introduce weekend competitions for women and improve the club's marketing. However, where discussions are constructive, this opens up possibilities for organisational change and reaching compromises between traditionalists and modernisers, and between younger and older generations. One volunteer's description of how the *'old guys'* were persuaded by younger members to relax

the dress code for the common good of the club is an excellent example of this. When this sort of thing happens, the impact on the affective club commitment of those volunteers pushing for change is hugely positive.

8.5.8 Affective club commitment and volunteer retention

In drawing the discussion to a conclusion, it is useful to end with a final point around affective club commitment and retention. As noted early in the introduction to this thesis, organisational commitment has a well-established relationship to encouraging and sustaining volunteering (Cuskelly et al., 1998; Cuskelly and Boag, 2001; Engelberg et al., 2012, 2014; Ringuet-Riot et al., 2014; Taylor et al., 2015). Although this study has not directly considered the relationship between affective club commitment and volunteer retention, it was evident from the interviews that those volunteers with high levels of affective club commitment were deeply embedded in their clubs and highly unlikely to leave. There was nothing to contradict the assumption that high affective club commitment translated into a stronger intention to remain both a member and a volunteer at the golf club. As such, there is a positive feedback loop whereby a strong affective club commitment helps to sustain membership and volunteering.

For associational golf clubs, and perhaps also voluntary sports clubs, the link between affective club commitment and retention has practical implications. In particular, by paying attention to the club socialisation of members and the nature of informal democratic participation, clubs should be able to enhance the retention of members and volunteers. As noted in the introduction to this thesis in chapter 1, the retention of members and volunteers is a key concern of voluntary sports clubs, including associational golf clubs. The findings and analysis from this thesis thereby offer insights into how clubs can enhance retention by promoting and sustaining the development of affective club commitment among members, including those that volunteer.

8.6 Discussion summary

This chapter has discussed the research findings and compared them to literature. It has considered how the evidence from this study and from literature helps to answer the research question. In this discussion chapter summary, the key points are revisited with attention drawn to the most significant ways in which the research findings support or contradict the literature.

This study's club socialisation model is like other volunteer socialisation models in finding different levels of organisational understanding and involvement that extend across various phases of the organisational socialisation process (Lois, 1999; Haski-Leventhal and Bargal, 2008; Kramer, 2011). However, the club socialisation model proposed in this thesis is fundamentally different in finding that most socialisation takes place as a member before volunteering begins. This analysis builds on our understanding that most sports clubs volunteers come from among the membership (Burgham and Downward, 2005; Cuskelly and O'Brien, 2013; Hallmann, 2015). Thus, *social experiences* as a member influence whether a member becomes a volunteer and shapes how they feel about the club.

The volunteer-member discussions identified in this study are much like the informal club democracy conceptualised by Ibsen et al. (2019). Discussions involve members sharing views and speaking to volunteers in the club. This study goes further by illustrating how the quality of these discussions affects volunteers. There are interesting parallels between the features of constructive volunteer-member discussion and deliberative discussion (Fishkin and Luskin, 2005; Elstub, 2008; Kim and Kim, 2008). The analysis suggests deliberative dialogue builds consensus, or at least compromise, and accords well with the notion that sports clubs can build relationships and solidarity among members (Rundle-Thiele and Auld, 2009; Nichols et al., 2012; Schlesinger and Nagel, 2018; Schlesinger et al., 2019; Wegner et al., 2019; Burrmann et al., 2020).

However, this study's findings also illustrate how destructive volunteer-member discussions may adversely affect volunteers and damage feelings of belonging and involvement, which is a feature of sports club volunteering less well recognised in the literature (Misener et al., 2010).

This study constructed affective club commitment to conceptualise volunteers' feelings towards their golf club. The concept is similar to the affective organisational commitment (Mowday et al., 1982; Meyer and Allen, 1997) used in other sports volunteering studies research (Cuskelly et al., 1998; Cuskelly and Boag, 2001; Hoye, 2007; Engelberg et al., 2012; Bang et al., 2013; Schlesinger et al., 2013, 2019). However, affective club commitment is different in recognising the distinct organisational context of voluntary sports clubs. In particular, affective club commitment is different in relating a sense of belonging to other club members and feelings of involvement to voluntary contributions made. The concept is also different in perceiving a building up of emotions, through belonging and involvement, which eventually transcend into pride in the whole organisation.

The practical implications arising from this study's findings are somewhat distinct from other literature on the management of volunteers in sports clubs. Whereas approaches to volunteer management often draw on human resource theory and are managerial and instrumental in their approach (Cuskelly et al., 2006; Taylor et al., 2015), the recommendations arising from this study focus more on creating a club environment in which volunteering can thrive. In particular, by attending to the club socialisation of members and the quality of informal democracy, clubs can encourage contributions from a more diverse range of members and do it in a way that is consensual and supportive of volunteers.

The use of constructivist grounded theory method (Charmaz, 2014) in this study has almost certainly had a bearing on the results generated. The research focussed on the volunteer perspective and, by taking an inductive approach, it

gave room for the emergence of what was important and meaningful to volunteers. The granular nature of grounded theory research brought volunteers' everyday experiences to the fore. In particular, it illuminated the everyday social experiences of volunteers, including who they talk to and what they talk about. Thus, social interactions with other members and their voluntary contributions were found to be meaningful to volunteers. Other interpretive research into sports club volunteers has yielded similar findings around interpersonal interactions and the meaningful nature voluntary contributions (Misener et al., 2010), although the grounded theory approach used in this study arguably led to a more abstract conceptualisation of the key themes.

9 Conclusion

9.1 Introduction to the conclusion chapter

In this concluding chapter, the threads of the thesis are drawn together. The central research question for this study was: how do volunteers' experiences within voluntary sports clubs shape their commitment to the organisation? This chapter, therefore, begins with a summary of the main conclusions, which seeks to answer the research question. This is followed by a statement of the key theoretical contributions of the research. The chapter goes on to address the practical implications of the research and makes a series of recommendations designed to build affective club commitment among golf club volunteers. Finally, the chapter ends with some reflections on the research and how further research may usefully develop and extend the scope of this study's theoretical concepts.

9.2 Thesis conclusions

9.2.1 Locating understanding in the voluntary sports club context

The first point to note from this thesis is the importance of the organisational context in understanding sports club volunteering. The findings emphasise how organisational conditions provide the backdrop for the volunteer experience. The way that volunteers feel about their club depends on the experiences that they have inside it. The rich accounts of volunteers presented in this study illustrate how the distinctive features of associational golf clubs, such as the functioning of informal club democracy, have a significant impact on the volunteer experience. Interpreting volunteers' perspectives was contingent on an underlying understanding of the associational golf club environment. Without this, many of the volunteers' experiences may have remained unintelligible. As such, efforts to understand volunteering in voluntary sports clubs must take into account the distinctive organisational context. The definition of voluntary sports club set out in section 2.2 of chapter 2 would

seem to provide an essential starting point for scholars of volunteering in voluntary sports clubs, to which the idiosyncrasies of particular sports and individual clubs can be added. There are distinctive aspects to volunteering in voluntary sports clubs and appreciating them is vital if we are to understand the volunteer perspective adequately.

9.2.2 Affective club commitment

By using grounded theory methodology, this thesis has constructed *affective club commitment* as a distinctive form of organisational commitment that is sympathetic to the context of volunteers in associational golf clubs. The dimensions of affective club commitment are a sense of belonging, a feeling of involvement and pride in the club. A sense of belonging is grounded in social and group relations with other club members. These relationships form as members through playing and social groups, and expand as volunteers encounter a wider range of members during the course of their volunteering. A feeling of involvement arises from voluntary contributions made to the golf club. Since volunteers consume club goods and services, which they have been involved in producing, this amplifies the feeling of involvement. From these feelings of belonging and involvement, volunteers can feel pride in their golf club. This pride is felt through a concern for the club's reputation and often expressed by making favourable comparisons to other golf clubs.

By conceptualising affective club commitment in this way, this thesis has integrated different feelings towards different targets within the club. A sense of belonging is principally felt towards other members. The feeling of involvement is principally felt towards the contributions made by the volunteer. The feeling of pride is principally felt towards the club as a whole. Importantly, each volunteer's affective club commitment is distinctive because their feelings are shaped by their personal experiences, including their unique social relationships and voluntary contributions. Thus, while the concept of affective club commitment provides a conceptual framework for interpreting the way volunteers feel about the golf club, no two volunteers feel quite the same.

9.2.3 The shaping of affective club commitment

The findings from this thesis illustrate how affective club commitment develops and changes over time. It takes a while for commitment to form and build though experience. It involves a building up and layering of feelings. As such, there is a temporal dimension to the formation of affective club commitment.

Notably, the research findings in this thesis indicate that the development of affective club commitment is not restricted to the volunteering experience but extends across the full period of club membership. Affective club commitment initially forms as a member. As members play golf and build social relations, they build a sense of belonging. This grounds affective club commitment in social relationships well before a member decides to volunteer. Therefore, when we consider how volunteers feel about their club, it is important to remember that this must encompass the feelings they have as a member. As such, there is continuity between membership and volunteering. While the transition between membership and volunteering may result in social interactions with additional members which may alter the sense of belonging, the bonds formed as members with playing and social groups endure. Furthermore, when individuals stop volunteering, it is unlikely that the feelings of belonging, involvement and pride, which have formed through relationships and contributions made, will suddenly dissipate. Affective club commitment is, therefore, a concept that usefully relates not just to volunteers but also to members that have never volunteered and to members that formerly volunteered.

That said, the development of affective club commitment is neither certain nor inexorable. The process by which affective club commitment forms is often messy. While affective club commitment is strengthened by positive experiences inside the club, it can also be harmed by negative experiences. Affective club commitment is thus shaped by the interplay of membership and

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volunteering experiences, both positive and negative, with the feelings of belonging and involvement.

9.2.4 Club socialisation

As the findings presented in chapter 5 illustrate, volunteers' feelings towards their club are formed and shaped well before they start volunteering. Volunteers are club members before they volunteer. Club socialisation as a member is, therefore, an important antecedent to volunteering in sports clubs, influencing not just whether and why members volunteer but also giving meaning to volunteering. In this way, club socialisation experiences have a major influence on the shaping of affective club commitment.

The findings from this study suggest that club socialisation comprises a series of stages (new member, established member and volunteer) that are traversed through two transition phases (settling in and activation). As individuals progress through the stages, they develop a greater understanding of their golf club, social relations and the role of volunteers. As such, the club socialisation process tends to result in meaningful volunteering.

The active management of members' club socialisation should command the attention of all those responsible for governing and managing golf clubs. Supporting new members to form relationships and develop a sense of belonging is critical for the development of affective club commitment. Without this, member retention and the recruitment of volunteers is less likely. Management strategies identified by this study to improve the club socialisation of members include reducing uncertainty for new members, helping new members to settle in and activating volunteering.

9.2.5 Volunteer-member discussions

As the findings in chapter 6 illustrate, since associational golf clubs are social and democratic organisations, volunteer-member discussions form a significant

part of the volunteer experience. As members become volunteers, their radius of social interactions expands. They begin to encounter members beyond their own playing and social circles. Members approach volunteers to discuss what is happening in the golf club and how the golf club should be run. These discussions cover a range of issues with the subject matter typically related to the volunteer's role responsibilities. It is apparent from these discussions that golf clubs are seldom embodiments of social and political unity. Members have different ideas, interests and opinions. Through such discussions, volunteers play a central role in the informal democracies of associational golf clubs.

The nature of the discussions that volunteers have with members affects how they feel about the golf club. Where volunteer-member discussions are destructive, volunteers typically feel frustrated. Destructive discussions are typically about trivial issues, based on misinformation, exclusive, legitimised through the status of the individual and aggressive in tone. Destructive discussions, and an inability to reach consensus, or at least compromise, may harm volunteers' sense of belonging to their club. In contrast, where volunteer member discussions are constructive, volunteers feel supported. Constructive discussions are more deliberative in character. They are typically about significant issues, based on full and accurate information, inclusive of all members, legitimised through reasoned argument and conducted in a respectful tone.

It is a central argument of this thesis that constructive volunteer-member discussions offer associational golf clubs a means of resolving differences among members, with consequential benefits to how volunteers feel about their golf club. Through constructive discussions, golf club volunteers can explore mutual understanding with members. It is through the exploration of ideas and arguments that members co-produce meaning with one another. In doing so, they are better placed to resolve disagreements through reasoned argument. As such, golf clubs that promote the informal deliberative discussion of issues between volunteers and members should be better placed to build

consensus, or at least compromise, among their membership. In this way, constructive volunteer-member discussions can play an important role in supporting volunteers. Through constructive volunteer-member discussions, volunteers can feel an enhanced sense of belonging to other members and pride in their voluntary contributions, both of which are key components of affective club commitment.

9.2.6   Interpersonal relations

The importance of interpersonal relations to the volunteer experience is a key theme running through this thesis. The findings show how the social experiences of membership and volunteering are critical in shaping affective club commitment. In particular, relationships with fellow members were found to drive volunteers' sense of belonging and underscore feelings of involvement. This thesis is, therefore, able to conclude that the interpersonal level of analysis, as identified by the volunteer process model (Omoto and Snyder, 1995, 2002; Snyder and Omoto, 2008), is vital to understanding volunteers in associational golf clubs.

9.2.7   Maintaining a supply of volunteers

As noted in the introduction to this thesis in chapter 1, it is important to understand the organisational commitment of sports club members because how they feel about their club affects the recruitment and retention of volunteers. This study's conclusion that social relationships play an essential role in the formation of affective club commitment is significant because the membership of golf clubs typically lack diversity, being comprised mostly of older white males. For those that don't share the demographic, socio-economic and cultural characteristics of existing members, a sense of belonging forms less easily. The reliance on social relationships to activate volunteering also restricts opportunities to feel involved, which is potentially exclusionary to those unable to form those relationships.

The members of associational golf clubs are seldom unified in their opinions about how their club should be run. This study found tensions between traditionalists and modernisers, which tend to form along generational grounds. Some volunteers, who wanted to see change within their clubs, faced resistance from older traditionalist members. Since the older traditionalists comprise the majority of club members and are vocal in their opinions, they tend to remain in the ascendency. For younger and modernising volunteers, a lack of support from other members acted as a constraint on their affective club commitment.

From this, it can be concluded that associational golf clubs need to foster affective club commitment among all members if they wish to maintain a diverse supply of members and volunteers in the long-term. This means finding ways to build commitment among young and old, male and female, good golfers and poor golfers, and traditionalists and modernisers. Golf clubs should seek to create the organisational conditions to foster positive experiences for all members and volunteers so that they can develop a sense of belonging, the feeling of involvement and a feeling of pride in their club.

With improved knowledge of how affective club commitment forms, voluntary sports clubs should be better placed to manage organisational conditions to encourage and sustain volunteering among their members. This study has shown that there are opportunities for sports clubs to actively manage organisational conditions so that they support volunteer recruitment and retention. Voluntary sports clubs can do this by managing activities that promote positive social interactions. In particular, they can: assimilate and activate members; and, promote constructive volunteer-member discussions and deliberative forms of club democracy.

9.3 Theoretical contributions of the research

The grounded theory constructed in this study is summarised in diagrammatic form in Figure 15 on page 247. Based on this, and by using Makadok et al.'s (2018) 'taxonomy of ways to make a contribution to theory' as a framework, several specific theoretical contributions to knowledge can be identified. Table 26 summarises these and, in doing so, demonstrates how this thesis makes a theoretical contribution to knowledge. In presenting their taxonomy, Makadok et al. argued that the development of theory is what sets aside researchers from practitioners. This is consistent with the central objective of the grounded theory method, which is to develop theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Urquhart, 2019). By drawing on Makadok et al.'s (2018) framework, the contributions of this research are brought into sharper focus.

Table 26 – Theoretical contributions and their classification

Theoretical contributions made by this study	Classification according to the 'taxonomy of ways of make a contribution to theory' (Makadok et al., 2018)	
	Levers of the theorising process	**Type of contribution**
In constructing *club socialisation* as a new and distinctive form of organisational socialisation for volunteers in voluntary sports clubs, this study has demonstrated how organisational socialisation models for volunteers need adapting for contexts. While club socialisation has similarities to other socialisation models (e.g. newcomer uncertainty, various stages of organisational understanding and involvement), there are also important differences (e.g. types of uncertainty, locating assimilation before volunteering starts). In showing how the club socialisation of sports club volunteers occurs during membership, this study has also identified club socialisation an important antecedent to volunteering rather than part of the volunteering experience. Club socialisation plays an important role in the formation of affective club commitment.	Constructs (What?)	Redefine, clarify, broaden or narrow an existing construct. Introduce a new construct as antecedent.

This study has built **volunteer-member discussions** as a new concept to represent a type of informal democracy within democratic membership-based voluntary organisations. It has proposed a framework for defining volunteer-member discussions which incorporate five key dimensions. The study has shown how the concept is useful for understanding the volunteer experience and as an influence on the development of affective club commitment.	Constructs (What?)	Introduce a new construct as focal phenomenon.
This study has constructed **affective club commitment** as a form of affective organisational commitment that is felt by volunteers in the context of associational golf clubs and, subject to further research, other voluntary sports clubs and membership-based organisations. The concept is distinctive because it allows for the layering and integration of multiple feelings towards multiple intra-organisational targets, comprising a sense of belonging to other members, a feeling of involvement to voluntary efforts made and pride in the organisation as a whole.	Constructs (What?)	Redefine, clarity, broaden or narrow an existing construct.
In section 9.4 below, this study draws on the theory constructed from the research to identify actions that golf clubs can take to develop of affective club commitment among their volunteers.	Outputs: explanations, predictions, prescriptions, etc.	Derive initial outputs from a new theory.

As previously called for in the sports management literature (Groom et al., 2014), this study uncovers some of the everyday experiences and social realties of sports club volunteers. The study adds to our interpretive understanding of sports club volunteers. In doing so, this thesis establishes two concepts in club socialisation and volunteer-member discussions that influence how volunteers feel about their sports clubs.

9.4   Practical recommendations

9.4.1   A new model for engaging sports club volunteers

This section draws on the novel findings and theoretical model of this study to make recommendation about how sports clubs can build affective club commitment among their members and volunteers. The section first considers how the theoretical model challenges us to think differently about the engagement of club volunteers. It then summarises the detailed

recommendations arising from this PhD study, which have been communicated to England Golf. The recommendations are presented in line with the structure of this thesis, thereby covering: the management of club socialisation; the management of volunteer-member discussions; and, the development of affective club commitment. By implementing the recommendations, it should be possible for associational golf clubs to build affective club commitment among their volunteers.

The model for understanding volunteer engagement in English associational golf clubs set out in Figure 15 on page 247 provides an alternative framework for thinking about the engagement of sports club volunteers. By linking individual's experiences, both as members and volunteers, to their feelings towards the club, the model emphasises the importance of adopting a management approach that attends to the wider context of club membership. Volunteer management should not be a siloed activity but a component of wider membership engagement involving the club socialisation of new members and the constructive engagement of members in democratic debates about the club. As such, this study has generated important insights into how clubs can foster commitment among their members and volunteers. The research suggests that management practices that create a framework to support everyday interactions, especially among members, should be an effective way of building and sustaining club commitment. It is suggestive of a more long-term approach to volunteer engagement that attempts to nurture engagement in an inclusive way and provide strong foundations for volunteering. This represents a different approach to the current dominant sports management strategies that attempt to sell the personal benefits and rewards of volunteering, which have already been shown to have their limitations (Nichols et al., 2019). It also represents an alternative angle to the volunteer management practices designed to specifically support volunteers, such as recruitment, training and recognition (Cuskelly et al., 2006), which risk treating volunteers in isolation from their membership experiences. It is the overriding recommendation of this thesis that sports clubs should approach

volunteer management by attending to the foundational aspects of member engagement.

The detailed recommendations set out below in sections 9.4.2, 9.4.3 and 9.4.4 build on the distinctive perspective offered by this study's grounded theory approach. The recommendations are principally targeted at golf clubs and their volunteers since these were the levels of analysis adopted in the study. Furthermore, the recommendations have been made to address the concerns of golf clubs around volunteer recruitment and retention, which were identified in section 1.3 of chapter 1. It is recognised, however, that if the research findings are to gain traction, England Golf, as the sport's governing body in England, must play a role in influencing golf clubs to adopt such practices. The challenges faced by national governing bodies in trying to persuade sports clubs to implement policy and practices are well documented (Harris et al., 2009; Adams, 2011; Donaldson et al., 2012). Whether golf clubs take on board the recommendations may ultimately depend on whether they deem them to be in their best interests. Since the research was performed at a substantive level within golf clubs, there is reason to be hopeful that the findings and recommendations will resonate with club volunteers. Nevertheless, successful adoption remains to be seen. How this study's research findings and recommendations are disseminated by England Golf, and whether the recommended practices are subsequently adopted by golf clubs, would make for interesting further research.

9.4.2   Managing club socialisation

As noted in the discussion of research findings in section 8.2.4 of chapter 8, it is strongly recommended that golf clubs strategically manage the club socialisation process. The aim of managing the club socialisation process is to successfully assimilate new members and create a pool of committed members from which volunteers can be recruited. Detailed recommendations for golf clubs on how to achieve this are provided in Table 27 below.

Table 27 - Actions to strengthen the pathway to golf club volunteering

	Recommendations
Reduce uncertainty for new members	• Welcome new members with an induction meeting and a tour of the club's facilities. Give new members the opportunity to ask questions. • Provide new members with a welcome pack with essential information about the club, including the club's history, vision, strategy, policies, rules, cultural practices, course and personnel. • Review club rules and cultural practices and consider relaxing as many as possible, thereby creating a less daunting environment for new members.
Help new members to settle in	• Create an orientation programme for new members. Beware overloading them with information early on. Sustain support for new members over several months. • Help new members form relationships with other newcomers so that they can support each other in learning about golf club life. For example, create new member groups. • Provide on-course coaching for inexperienced golfers, ideally in groups, as this helps members develop confidence in playing the course. • Establish a buddy scheme that pairs up new members with established members who can provide informal advice about the golf club. • Help new members find an established playing group with like-minded members. • Help members spend more time at the golf club by integrating work and family commitments (e.g. offer hot desk space, high-quality Wi-Fi, family activities). • Since an effective new member orientation programme requires management, establish a volunteer role to co-ordinate it.
Activate volunteering	• Encourage member engagement in club affairs by regularly promoting the club's vision, strategy and improvement initiatives (e.g. with leaflets in the clubhouse, posts on social media) with the aim of stimulating discussion among groups. • Ensure everyone has access to information about volunteer role vacancies by advertising them using a range of media (e.g. noticeboards, newsletters, social media). Include strong messaging around inclusivity. • Get all existing volunteers to promote role vacancies by word-of-mouth. Encourage them to discuss role vacancies with their playing and friendship groups. • Encourage outgoing volunteers to make themselves available to discuss their role with potential volunteers.

9.4.3 Managing volunteer-member discussions

As suggested in the discussion of research findings in section 8.3.4 in chapter 8, associational golf clubs can improve the volunteer experience by promoting informal deliberative democratic participation among members. By nurturing informal deliberative democratic participation and facilitating constructive volunteer-member discussions, there is the potential to develop mutual understanding and a greater sense of belonging and involvement. Detailed recommendations for golf clubs on how to achieve this are provided in Table 28 below.

Table 28 - Actions to nurture constructive volunteer-member discussions

	Recommendations
Bring significant issues to the fore in club communications	• Develop a vision and long-term strategy for the golf club and promote it among members. • Provide members with regular reports on what progress is being made against the long-term strategic plan.
Provide members with regular, accurate and reliable information	• Treat member communication as a strategically important function. • Communicate regularly with members and try to be transparent by sharing information. • Use a variety of media (e.g. newsletters, social media, noticeboards) to ensure that members can access information in their favoured format.
Make club discussions inclusive by encouraging all members to get involved	• Consult with members when developing club strategy and before major decisions are made. • Give all members the opportunity to participate by using a range of accessible engagement methods (e.g. member surveys, online tools, forums, workshops, consultation stands). • Consider who among the membership is not contributing to discussions and reach out to them. For example, make sure new members, women and juniors are included in discussions just as much as established adult male members. • Don't leave member engagement to the AGM.

Value arguments based on their merits, not on who is making them	• Emphasise the value of well-reasoned, creative and innovative thinking rather than historical precedence. • Promote the contributions made by non-traditional members and volunteers.
Promote civility and respect throughout the club	• Develop and promote club values as they help shape club culture. Involve members in developing the values. • Include 'respect for others' or something similar as one of the club's core values. • Recognise the contribution of volunteers through club communications.

9.4.4 Developing affective club commitment

As suggested in the discussion of research findings in section 8.4.4 in chapter 8, associational golf clubs can support the growth of affective club commitment by supporting activities that allow members to develop a sense of belonging, a feeling of involvement and take pride in the club. Detailed recommendations are provided in Table 29 below.

Table 29 - Actions to develop affective club commitment

	Recommendations
Help members to develop a sense of belonging by supporting them to build social relationships within the club.	• See recommendations in section 9.4.2 on helping new members to settle in under managing club socialisation.
Help members to develop a feeling of involvement by encouraging them to participate in the club.	• Provide all members with quick and easy bite-size opportunities to participate (e.g. an hour's course maintenance working party). • See recommendations on managing member discussion in section 9.4.3.
Help members to feel pride in the club by promoting the club's achievements.	• Record and publicise positive feedback from visitors to the club. • Obtain local media coverage for the club's achievements. • Obtain positive external accreditations for the club (e.g. the England Golf Clubmark).

9.5 Reflections and opportunities for future research

9.5.1 Reflections on the study

Further to documenting the conclusions, theoretical contributions and practical recommendations of this study, this section reflects on the research. It evaluates to what extent the research has answered the research question, which was: *how do volunteers' experiences within voluntary sports clubs shape their commitment to the organisation*? In doing this, this section considers the choices and subjectivity of the researcher, and the substantive nature of the research.

Firstly, the question posed in this research was broad and relatively open-ended. It provided scope for issues and phenomena to emerge from the data. There was no predetermination of the experiences that would shape volunteers' club commitment. As the research proceeded, it was the identification of frequent and significant codes that brought concepts to the fore. As Charmaz (2014: 139) argues, '*focussed coding directs our analysis early in the research process*'. Inevitably, this process leaves behind some codes and potential concepts that may be significant in the shaping of volunteers' organisational commitment. Promising but forsaken codes from this research revolved around volunteer teamwork and the constraints of other life commitments. These codes may have yielded additional rich insight, but the researcher chose to focus on the codes that appeared to have the most significance. This matters because it is a limitation of this research that it focusses on a comparatively narrow set of phenomena. Many other experiences shape volunteers' organisational commitment and they are not investigated in this study. As such, it must be recognised that the findings presented in this thesis represent a partial account of how volunteers' experiences within associational golf clubs shape their commitment to the organisation.

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In reflecting on the choices made by the researcher during the study, it is apparent that researcher subjectivity had some influence on the study's conclusions. Researcher choices were present throughout the research process, from the questions asked at interview and through the coding and analysis of data. While this researcher has made every conscientious effort to limit subjectivity, the analysis presented in this thesis is, at least in part, a construction of reality particular to the researcher. If other researchers addressed the same question, they would likely come up with somewhat different conclusions.

Thirdly, it is important to reflect on how this study's focus on volunteers in associational golf clubs affects the conclusions that can be drawn from this research. Theories constructed through a grounded theory study are substantive to the subject researched, bounded as they are by temporal and contextual factors (Charmaz, 2014). The theory constructed in this thesis is, therefore, grounded in the substantive case of volunteers in associational golf clubs in England. Indeed, it is one of the strengths of the grounded theory approach that findings are firmly grounded in data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2014; Urquhart, 2019). Without further study though, it is not possible to assert that the theories from this study will necessarily transfer to other contexts. For now, at least, the theories constructed in this study remain substantive ones. Nevertheless, it is useful to consider how the theories may have wider applicability. In particular, it is useful to consider how more research may help to develop concepts further and extend the scope of the theories to other contexts. These aspects of theory development are discussed in the next two sections.

9.5.2 Further developing theoretical concepts

Urquhart (2013) notes that research findings can be developed to reach different levels of conceptualisation. Whereas description involves low levels of conceptualisation, theoretical renderings involve high levels of conceptualisation. While the theory presented in this study involves a

significant amount of interpretation, there remains scope for further conceptual development and abstraction. This section considers options for enhancing the conceptualisation of the three main concepts constructed in this study.

Organisational socialisation theory (Kramer, 2010) suggests that there is scope to develop this study's club socialisation theory further. In particular, there are opportunities to extend the theory to include the pre-entry anticipatory socialisation of members, failed socialisation and volunteer exit. Each of these opportunities is now discussed in turn.

Pre-entry anticipatory socialisation is an established element of many organisational socialisation theories (Kramer, 2010). In the context of associational golf clubs, the pre-entry stage would apply to golfers that are thinking about joining a club for the first time. A study into new prospective members could, therefore, provide an opportunity to investigate the period prior to golfers joining a club and how golfers encounter golf clubs, how they select a golf club and how they anticipate their role within it. Extending the theory backwards in this way may help to deepen our understanding of the social process by which golfers become club volunteers.

In developing a theory on organisational socialisation within golf clubs, this thesis focussed on current volunteers and therefore tracked individuals that had successfully socialised. However, as observed by study participants, some newcomers are not welcomed, denied interactions with other members and do not transition to feeling comfortable as an established member. Further research into the experience of new golf club members should help to test the new member stage more fully. It would be useful to explore what experiences and what communication helps to reduce new member uncertainty. It would also be useful to explore what barriers exist to overcoming uncertainty.

Furthermore, since this study focussed on the experience of current volunteers, it did not investigate retirement or organisational exit as a final stage of

organisational socialisation. Organisational exit is a common feature of many organisational socialisation theories (Haski-Leventhal and Bargal, 2008; Kramer, 2010). Further research could usefully explore how golf club and other sports club volunteers leave their volunteer roles. This could be done by interviewing former volunteers. There may be some interesting perspectives on how volunteers manage this process, including whether volunteers remain members or leave the organisation altogether. It is likely that 'exit' within voluntary sports clubs will differ from other employment and volunteering contexts because, although they may cease volunteering, they may retain their club membership. Thus, their exit will be from the role but not necessarily the organisation.

The five features of volunteer-member discussions identified in this study are also open to further conceptual development. At present, while the conceptualisation goes beyond description and incorporates interpretation, there is still scope to increase the degree of conceptualisation by exploring the concept in diverse contexts (Urquhart, 2013). The conceptualisation could be enhanced further by considering whether the five features of discussion are also present in discussions between non-volunteering members when they talk about how their club should be run. This could help to establish the concept of member discussion at a higher theoretical level as it would then apply to all member discussion and not just discussions between volunteers and members. It would also be interesting to consider whether the five features of volunteer-member discussions are present across a diverse range of membership-based voluntary organisations. Further sampling of discussions in both golf clubs and other types of voluntary organisation should, therefore, help to enhance the degree of conceptualisation.

Finally, there are also options for enhancing the degree of conceptualisation of affective club commitment. This study described and interpreted how volunteers' sense of belonging and feeling of involvement transcended into pride in their golf club. Pride was readily identified as a top layer to the concept of affective club commitment because volunteers were keen to talk about their

clubs' successes. However, there are golf clubs that are struggling to survive in a changing operational environment and their sustainability is at risk. It would, therefore, be interesting to perform further research to investigate how the concept of affective club commitment stands up in the context of organisational failure. For example, it would be interesting to explore whether volunteers feel any shame when golf clubs face closure. In this way, the concept of affective club commitment could be developed further.

9.5.3   Extending the scope of the theories

Urquhart (2013) notes that the scope of theories can vary. Some theories have limited scope, as they are bounded by context. Formal theories have a greater scope because they are more abstract and have transferability to other contexts. While the theories developed in this thesis may have wider applicability beyond the substantive case, further theoretical sampling is needed to establish this. Thus, it is useful to consider where and who may be sampled to further extend the scope of this study's theories.

This thesis focussed on the perspective of volunteers inside associational golf clubs. As such, the theories developed are based around volunteers' experiences and perspectives. Furthermore, the research participants were adults in formal volunteer roles. The scope of the theories could, therefore, be extended by further sampling youth volunteers and informal episodic volunteers in golf clubs. It would also be useful to consider some of the concepts developed in this study from the perspective of other actors within associational golf clubs. In particular, it seems likely that club socialisation, volunteer-member discussions and affective club commitment will have some applicability to members that do not volunteer. It would be interesting to consider how non-volunteering members' experiences and perspectives differ from those of volunteers. It would also be interesting to consider volunteer-member discussions and affective club commitment from the perspective of former volunteers. The perspective of former volunteers would seem to be especially significant given that they often featured in the accounts of

volunteer-member discussions told by research participants in this study. It would be interesting to find out how the perspectives and feelings of volunteers change once they retire from volunteering but continue as club members.

Since golf is a global sport, further sampling of associational golf club volunteers across countries would help to establish the transferability of this study's theories from the English to other geographic contexts. Other regions where associational golf clubs are common include the rest of the United Kingdom and Ireland, Western Europe, North America and Australasia (R&A, 2017). The extent to which the findings are transferable may depend on regional cultures. It is plausible, nonetheless, to think that the theories will have some transferability because the British Empire transmitted ideas and cultures through sport from the late nineteenth century onwards (Holt, 1990). Golf, as a sport, also appears to have a distinctive global culture. Further research that tests this study's findings in associational golf clubs in other countries would help to confirm global applicability.

The theories constructed in this thesis may also help us to understand volunteers in voluntary clubs in other sports. As noted in section 2.2 of chapter 2, voluntary sports clubs share distinctive features, which suggest that there may be common volunteer experiences across them regardless of the sport. There are, however, reasons to be cautious about the transferability of findings from the associational golf club context. In comparison to other sports clubs, golf clubs have large memberships (Sport and Recreation Alliance, 2013), which may have implications for social relations within clubs. Other authors have already suggested that club size influences the volunteer experience (Wicker and Breuer, 2013b; Schlesinger and Nagel, 2018). Golf, although it does have some team elements, is also mostly an individual sport. The experience of club volunteers may differ when organising team sports, such as football, cricket and rugby. Furthermore, not all sports clubs have the same ownership of clubhouse facilities as golf, with many clubs reliant on renting out space in public sports facilities that may lack spaces for socialising before and after play. This seems

especially relevant given the significance of social interactions noted in this study. It seems likely that the theories developed by this study will have most transferability to sports with large club memberships, clubhouse facilities and individual participation, such as tennis and bowls. Further research that theoretically samples club volunteers in other sports should help to extend or limit the scope of the theories presented in this thesis.

The theories constructed in this thesis may also help us to understand volunteers in non-sporting membership-based voluntary organisations. Aside from the organisational focus on sport, other voluntary organisations share the features of voluntary sports clubs listed in Table 1 in section 2.2 of chapter 2. Many other voluntary organisations are set up to pursue a shared interest, democratically constituted, self-governing, non-profit distributing and membership-based. In many of these organisations, members will be both producers and consumers of the organisations' services or products. Since social interaction among members is central to the theories developed in this study, the transferability of findings to other voluntary organisations seem most likely in such organisations where there is a high degree of social interaction among members. Potentially relevant organisations may include places of religious worship, where social interactions among congregations and their volunteers may impact organisational socialisation, volunteer-member-discussions and organisational commitments. Local community associations, including those that run local community centres and village halls, also provide contexts in which this study's theories could resonate. Further research into volunteers' experiences in these contexts should help to establish the applicability of the theories presented in this thesis.

9.6   Covid-19 reflections

All field research for this PhD was completed prior to the outbreak of Covid-19. The findings presented above are, therefore, not made with any particular consideration of golf in an era of Covid-19. There is a possibility that post-Covid-19, changes in the way people play golf and interact with each other may result in different forms of socialisation, member discussion and club commitment. On the other hand, the findings in this study may provide golf club managers with insights that they can use to build stronger golf clubs as they emerge from Covid-19.

Golf initially suffered under Covid-19. Golf courses in England were forced to close between 23rd March and 13th May 2020, with restrictions on playing partners and social distancing remaining in force thereafter. However, golf experienced a boom in participation as the country came out of lockdown, with the number of golf rounds estimated to have increased between 40% and 60% during the summer compared to the previous year (Sports Marketing Surveys, 2020). Furthermore, golf clubs have reported increases in the number of new members (Walsh, 2020). It appears that the golf has benefitted from being one of the first sports allowed back post-lockdown. However, while this is a source of optimism for the golf industry, this study suggests that there is much work for golf clubs to do to convert new members into established members and then to get them involved. This research suggests that the formation of social relationships is a vital component to the development of affective club commitment, yet social distancing requirements may impinge on how golf clubs encourage and support social interaction. Therefore, while golf may currently be basking in the glow of a post-lockdown enthusiasm, this research would suggest that golf clubs will need to be creative in supporting and sustaining affective club commitment among members.

10 Appendices

10.1 Presentations and publications from the PhD

A list of publications and presentations arising from the PhD research project is provided below:

Mackintosh, C. and Mills, C. (2019). 'Golf: girls who golf'. *Sport Management Magazine*, January, pp.70-73.

Mills, C. (2019) *Organizational engagement and the decision to volunteer: A study of volunteers in English golf clubs*. Paper presented at the annual conference of the Voluntary Sector Studies Network (VSSN), Birmingham, UK.

Mills, C. (2020) *Organisational socialisation and the decision to volunteer: A study of volunteers in English golf clubs.* A presentation to the Sports Volunteering Research Network (SVRN), London, UK.

Mills, C. (2020) *Frustrated by 'moaning members': A study of volunteers in associational golf clubs*. A presentation to the Voluntary Sector Studies Network (VSSN) conference on Emotions and Feelings in Voluntary Sector Work, online, UK.

Mills, C., Mackintosh, C. and Urquhart, C (2021) *Encouraging participation in golf clubs: a research report on golf club volunteering*. Lincolnshire: England Golf.

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